

CHAPTER 2

IBN TAYMIYYA AND HIS CHILDREN

When the trumpet of the Last Judgement sounds the dead all rise from their graves and rush to the Field of Judgement "like men rallying to a Standard." There they take up their station before God, in two mighty crowds separated from each other, the faithful on one side and the unbelieving on the other; and each individual is judged by God. . . .

The bi-partition of the crowd in Islam is unconditional. The faithful and the unbelieving are fated to be separate for ever and to fight each other. The war of religion is a sacred duty and thus, though in a less comprehensive form, the double crowd of the Last Judgement is prefigured in every earthly battle.

—ELIAS CANETTI, *Crowds and Power*¹

SPEAKING TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE and listeners around the world in his January 2002 State of the Union Address, President George W. Bush capped his discussion of the nation's new and unexpected war on terrorism by saying: "The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends; it is not our many Arab friends. Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists, and every government that supports them. We are not deceived by their pretenses to piety."

They are not imbued with the spirit of religion, these terrorists, they only claim to be. The President's message echoed sentiments heard throughout the country in the aftermath of the attacks of September 11, 2001. The destruction of the World Trade Center, the crash into the Pentagon, and the killings aboard four hijacked planes could not have been the work of men who earnestly saw themselves fulfilling God's wishes—they could not be adherents of any of the world's three great monotheistic faiths. Bush returned to the theme repeatedly. "The terrorists are defined by their hatreds: they hate democracy and tolerance and free expression and women and Jews and Christians and all Muslims who disagree with them," he told the members of the German Bundestag during his visit to Berlin in May. "Others killed in the name of racial purity, or the class struggle. These enemies kill in the name of a false religious purity, perverting the faith they claim to hold."

These were words of condemnation but also of reassurance. To millions of American Muslims, the fastest-growing religious community in the country, they sent a message of solidarity and understanding at a time of harassment and alienation. In Germany and other European countries with proportionally larger Muslim populations, they helped calm domestic tensions. To U.S. friends abroad from the Maghreb to Indonesia, they signaled American respect for Islam at a moment when governments friendly to Washington were under fire from large parts of their citizenry, which believed America gave Muslims second-class treatment. For all three audiences, one point was crucial: America was declaring—and rightly—that the vast majority of the world's Muslims should not be tarred with the deeds of the hijackers. These acknowledgments were important not only for atmospherics, but to enable foreign governments to sustain law-enforcement and intelligence cooperation with the United States in the fight against the new breed of terrorists.

There were other benefits to the President's rhetoric, but the sum of all these virtues is not the same as the truth. For the fact is that the attack against America on September 11, 2001, was an act of consummate religious devotion. Those who committed it were deeply pious.

They expressed their motives in indisputably religious terms, and they saw themselves as carrying out the will of God. "Consider that this is a raid on a path," Muhammad Atta wrote in the document that he and his coconspirators used as a kind of final psalm. "As the Prophet said, 'A raid on the path of God . . . is better than this world and what is in it.'" The hijackings were the performance of a sacrament, one intended to restore to the universe a moral order that had been corrupted by the enemies of Islam and their Muslim collaborators.

There is no gainsaying President Bush on this account. He said what needed to be said, held tight the ties that bind America to important allies, and reaffirmed tolerance at home. And, in fact, after the 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in East Africa, the authors of this book helped draft similar language that President Clinton used to describe the perpetrators of that atrocity. "I want the world to understand that our actions today were not aimed against Islam, the faith of hundreds of millions of good, peace-loving people all around the world, including the United States," he announced after the United States launched its missile strikes against terrorist training camps in Afghanistan and a chemical plant in Sudan. "No religion condones the murder of innocent men, women, and children. But our actions were aimed at fanatics and killers who wrap murder in the cloak of righteousness, and in so doing, profane the great religion in whose name they claim to act."

But neither President's necessary and useful political speech should obscure the realities of September 11: the motivation for the attack was neither political calculation, strategic advantage, nor wanton bloodlust. It was to humiliate and slaughter those who defied the hegemony of God; it was to please Him by reasserting His primacy. It was an act of cosmic war. What appears to be senseless violence actually made a great deal of sense to the terrorists and their sympathizers, for whom this mass killing was an act of redemption.

Only by understanding the religious nature of the attacks of September 11 can we make any sense of their unprecedented scale and their intended effects. And only by doing so will we have any chance of under-

standing the enemy and arriving at a plan to defeat it—a task that began with the war in Afghanistan but could take a generation to finish.

At the Foley Square federal courthouse in lower Manhattan, Room 318 is reserved for high-security trials. A cavernous room with wood-paneled walls and dark marble pilasters, it is only a few steps from the gated crosswalk to the Metropolitan Corrections Center. In case of a disturbance, guards can be rushed into the courtroom and defendants can be hustled back to their cells. It is not a place one would ordinarily come to hear a discussion of medieval Islamic law.

But on February 6, 2001, such a discussion took place in Room 318. The occasion was the testimony of Jamal Ahmad al-Fadl, a former member of al-Qaeda and an FBI informant who was the first witness in the trial for the bombing of U.S. embassies in East Africa in 1998. A native of Sudan, al-Fadl had lived in Saudi Arabia and the United States before leaving for Pakistan in the late 1980s to join the mujahidin in Afghanistan and fight against the Soviet Union. By his own testimony, he became a member of al-Qaeda sometime in 1989–1990, at a military training camp near the Afghan city of Khost. In the course of his training, al-Fadl learned how to fire a Kalashnikov and a rocket-propelled grenade launcher (RPG); he became adept at the use of explosives, including TNT and C-4. At the end of 1990, al-Fadl moved with Usama bin Laden's organization to Sudan, where he acted as an al-Qaeda courier, financial front man, and liaison to Sudanese intelligence. Again by his own account, al-Fadl fled Sudan in 1996, after bin Laden discovered that he had pocketed \$110,000 in illicit commissions on the sale of goods imported by one of the Saudi's businesses. Al-Fadl approached a number of countries with information about bin Laden and Sudan, and eventually walked into an American embassy—its location has not been disclosed—and announced that he had information about impending terrorist attacks.²

During the trial, al-Fadl recounted how Abu Hajer, a senior bin Laden lieutenant and the man responsible for procuring material for weapons of

mass destruction for al-Qaeda, instructed members of the group in the teachings of ibn Taymiyya, a medieval Muslim theologian. Al-Fadl did not show himself to be deeply knowledgeable about ibn Taymiyya. Asked for biographical information about the theologian, for example, al-Fadl said he lived “1700 or 1800” years ago, an error of about a thousand years—ibn Taymiyya was born in 1269 c.e. Of ibn Taymiyya’s voluminous works on Islamic law and public policy and his hundreds of epistles and fatwas, al-Fadl claimed to have read a single section—dedicated to the concept of jihad—from a larger tract on statecraft.

Despite this limited acquaintance, al-Fadl’s remarks made clear that ibn Taymiyya was held in the highest esteem by al-Qaeda, and that the group looked to him as a source of inspiration and justification for their violence. To the prosecutor’s question about what Abu Hajer had told him and other al-Qaeda recruits, al-Fadl responded in his poor English,

He said that our time now is similar like in that time, and he say ibn al Tamiyeh, when a tartar come to Arabic war, Arabic countries that time, he say some Muslims, they help them. And he says ibn al Tamiyeh, he make a fatwah. He said anybody around the tartar, he buy something from them and he sell them something, you should kill him. And also, if when you attack the tartar, if anybody around them, anything, or he’s not military or that—if you kill him, you don’t have to worry about that. If he’s a good person, he go to paradise and if he’s a bad person, he go to hell.

In other words, anyone who joins with the “Tartar”—meaning a Muslim apostate—to fight against believing Muslims should be attacked, whether they fight alongside the Tartar or simply do business with him. The warrior need not worry about killing noncombatants, because God will give them their rightful reward.

Al-Fadl’s remarks garble what the great Islamic jurist wrote, but the kernel of his testimony does come from ibn Taymiyya. Out of the thought of this medieval preacher, a contemporary of Dante’s, a current formed

within the ocean of Islamic thought and practice. Alternately slowed and accelerated by social and political circumstances, it gathered tremendous strength in the twentieth century and emerged as a profoundly powerful and disruptive force. To grasp the worldview of al-Qaeda and its leader, Usama bin Laden, it is essential to start with ibn Taymiyya.

Taqi al-Din ibn Taymiyya was born in the ancient town of Harran, which today lies in Turkey, a few miles from the border with Syria and about 350 miles northeast of Damascus. Harran sits within the vast Eurasian region that was conquered by the earliest waves of Muslim warriors who emerged from the Arabian peninsula in the seventh century. Six hundred years later, it was in the borderlands of Arab civilization. Ibn Taymiyya's family was forced to flee to Damascus when he was six years old to escape one of a series of Mongol (or Tartar, as they are often called) invasions that swept across Arab lands in the thirteenth century. At the time, Mongol armies from Central Asia had already shattered the Baghdad-based Abbasid empire, which had lasted almost five hundred years. It was said of territories conquered by the Mongol horsemen that "no eye remained open to weep for the dead." This was no exaggeration: Mongol rule, dependent on the threat of collective punishment and insubordination, led to the wholesale destruction of unruly villages with the massacre of every living thing. When Hulagu, a Mongol commander and nephew of Genghis Khan, moved against Baghdad in 1258, he destroyed the elaborate, centuries-old dikes that regulated the waters of the Tigris and supported the intensive cultivation of the surrounding land. As they tried to escape the onslaught, Baghdadis drowned in the flooded plains by the thousands. When the capture of the ancient city was a certainty, the last Abbasid caliph agreed to surrender. Any hope that the capital would be spared was in vain: the Mongols tore down the city's mosques, palaces, libraries, and academies. They put the city to the torch, and butchered those who escaped the flames, killing at least 800,000 men, women, and children. The caliph

and his sons were taken out of the city, bundled in carpets, and trampled to death by horses.

Christians, a significant minority in Baghdad, were spared. Within the Mongol empire, Christians enjoyed a place of privilege; many, mostly from Asia Minor, had put their skills at the service of the rulers and were accepted in the upper reaches of society. Rising to become commanders and administrators, they intermarried with the leading families, who embraced some Christian customs and beliefs. Moreover, Christendom viewed the Mongols as potential allies. One hundred years after the failure of the Crusades, both Latin and Byzantine Christians saw the Mongol advance as a hopeful development, one that might help resurrect the dream of rolling back the Muslim conquest.

As the Mongol invaders pressed forward, however, they adopted elements from the cultures they came to dominate, in particular the religion of Islam. In the late thirteenth century, the khan Mahmud Ghazan formalized this haphazard development by officially converting to Islam, bringing the rest of his tribesmen with him. The tenets of the Mongols' newly adopted faith were blended with long-held pagan beliefs and customs, as well as with the remnants of the Christian practices they had flirted with and were reluctant to abandon.

Warfare between Muslims is condemned in the Quran, but the Mongols' conversion did not stop them from pursuing conquests in the lands of the established Muslim dynasties of the Middle East. Their ruthless and inexorable advance created panic, even desperation, in Syria. For Arabs living through this period, civilization seemed on the brink of destruction. Ibn Taymiyya's own family's flight from the invading Mongol forces would instill in him a searing hatred for the Mongols and all who were like them—Muslims who adulterated Islamic faith with alien practices.

Both ibn Taymiyya's father and grandfather were noted theologians. In Damascus, he demonstrated academic genius and, while still an adolescent, emerged as a tough, uncompromising religious authority. In 1282 he succeeded his father as professor of Hanbali law, one of the four major schools of Sunni Islamic jurisprudence. Contemporary accounts depict

him as a broad-shouldered, long-haired zealot, unconventional in behavior and belief. It was said that as he strode to the mosque he would kick over the game boards of backgammon players in the street out of disgust at their frivolity. He attacked his ideological opponents with a vigor that seemed pathological. He made a habit of offending individuals close to the local rulers, and was imprisoned five times for his blistering critiques of colleagues in the religious establishment. He died a prisoner in the Citadel of Damascus, his pens and papers taken away to stop the flow of polemics smuggled out of his cell. The independence that angered the powerful endeared him to the public. Tens of thousands would turn out for his funeral procession.

By his early twenties, ibn Taymiyya was a popular preacher at Damascus's ancient Umayyad Mosque. There and in Cairo, then the center of the Muslim world, he excoriated Muslims who deviated from the true way of Islam. That path was not to be found, ibn Taymiyya held, in the teachings of the contemporary ulema, the religious-scholarly establishment. The clerics had distorted the truth by abandoning an exclusive focus on the Quran and hadith, the traditional accounts of Muhammad's actions and sayings, and dwelling instead on commentaries accumulated over generations. By forsaking the scriptural core of the religion, and tolerating beliefs and practices that the earliest generation of Muslims, the *salaf*, tried to eliminate, religious leaders had lost touch with the essentials of the faith.

Ibn Taymiyya was not so radical as to urge the rejection of Islamic scholarship, but he opposed uncritical adherence to it. His thinking was revolutionary in its opposition to the contemporary view that the final interpretation of Islamic scriptures had been achieved, and that further work would only produce heretical innovation. The ulema of the time deemed the gates of *ijtihad*—the independent interpretation of religious doctrine—closed. For ibn Taymiyya, they were wide open. Only when the individual believer entered them and committed himself to a struggle with the scriptures could Islam be purified. In emphasizing personal engagement with holy writ over the views of the clerical establishment, ibn

Taymiyya is akin to two great figures in Christendom: his near contemporary John Wyclif, who first translated the Bible into English, and Martin Luther.

In his writings, ibn Taymiyya focused on issues of statecraft and good governance, essential ones in his conception of Islam. This was not ground that attracted his fellow religious scholars, who had little stomach for criticizing their rulers; such activities reliably brought a stiff prison sentence. Most paid lip service to the lost ideal of a unified caliphate, a Muslim world ruled from one end to the other by one of the “rightly guided” caliphs, as the first four successors to Muhammad were called.

That was the golden age: one God, one prophet, one scripture, one people, and one ruler. The caliph symbolized the indivisibility of politics and religion, and he exercised his authority through the enforcement of sharia and his pursuit of jihad to enlarge the realm of Islam. He was, moreover, the leader of an ascendant movement destined to conquer the world and thereby redeem it. Division, however, appeared early. The question of who would be the fourth caliph arose when Ali, Muhammad’s son-in-law and nephew, was confronted by Muawiya, a warlord from a branch of Muhammad’s tribe. The crisis was defused by a compromise, and Muawiya stopped pressing his claim. But some warriors in Ali’s camp protested violently. They denied Ali’s right to bargain over God’s determination that he should be caliph, as much as they rejected Muawiya’s arrogance in denying His will. What they found most repugnant was the recourse to mediation by men, which to them represented the elevation of human judgment over the divine. Known as Kharijites, from the Arabic word for *depart* (the name was interpreted by later generations to mean “those who departed from the community of true Muslims”), they began a campaign against Ali, whom they assassinated, and Muawiya that lasted fifty years. Among the many forms of their extremism, the Kharijites imposed unyielding standards of observance on all Muslims and declared an excommunication—they proclaimed *takfir*, or condemnation—against some who otherwise would simply be admonished for their wrongdoings. But for the Kharijites, these offenses war-

ranted the capital punishment normally reserved only for blasphemers. For creating the first great rift in *umma*, the community of believers, the Kharijites would be cursed by mainstream Islam, and they continue to be reviled today. But further, more lasting divisions soon appeared. A single caliph would continue to rule, but his power was limited. The realm of Islam, which had expanded miraculously in the seventh century, came to be fractured and ruled by different rival dynasties—the Abbasids in Iraq, the Fatimids in Egypt, the Almohads in North Africa and Spain, to name a few. After the Abbasids' defeat by the Mongols, the Mamluks, a Turkish dynasty, ruled over Egypt and Syria at the end of the thirteenth century, and they were not disposed to entertain questions about who should properly rule the *umma* at a time when there was no obvious mandate from heaven.

Ibn Taymiyya was enough of a realist to accept that the caliphate of the seventh century was dead, and that the division of the once unified realm of Islam was irreversible. There would no longer be rulers who were at once pope and king, who embodied in one person supreme religious authority and political leadership. The modern notion of separate realms of the religious and the secular would have been inconceivable to Ibn Taymiyya, and to all Muslims of his time. Indeed, an integral part of Islam's glory was the figure of the caliph—the divinely mandated leader whose forces led a lightning conquest of much of the known world for the faith. Now Ibn Taymiyya searched for new approaches that might preserve the essence of the caliphal concept in a new historical setting. He came to see the relationship between the ruler and his subjects as a contract. The people would offer their obedience to the sultan in return for just rule in accordance with Islamic law. But who, then, would provide the missing religious dimension of leadership? Who would provide day-to-day guidance on matters ranging from what one could eat to how one conducted business to how social relations should be regulated? Ibn Taymiyya's answer was that the clergy would perform this function, in ef-

fect sharing the responsibilities of government: the sultan would consult the ulema regularly, and the routine exercise of his authority would be informed by their views.

With this idea, ibn Taymiyya sought nothing less than a redefinition of politics. Generations of caliphs had come and gone since the first, rightly guided ones, and their deference to the ulema had been uneven to say the least. Government had become more and more secularized.

Ibn Taymiyya's refusal to accept the subordination of religion to the state, his insistence on religious observance and genuine coordination between the ruler and the clerical establishment, was an attempt to re-create the essence of a long-lost order in a new age. His were serious demands: a ruler who did not enforce sharia or exhibit scrupulous personal piety would be no better than an apostate, and under Islamic law, Muslims were obligated to rebel against such a leader. To obey a leader who violated the precepts of Islam would be to reject the word of God and be guilty of apostasy oneself.

Ibn Taymiyya responded to the Mongols' existential threat to Islamic civilization by building up the bulwarks of his own identity and belief. The harassment of Muslims on the margins of the empire elicited in him a yearning to purify the faith and distinguish between the true Muslims on his side of the boundary and the semi-pagans on the other side. Like many religious thinkers in similar situations, he probably believed divine judgment loomed behind the depredations of the Mongols: the attacks from without were punishment for corruption within, which urgently needed to be removed. And, it seems, his experience of living on a dangerous frontier in a perilous time made him more combative. For all these reasons, ibn Taymiyya was preoccupied with the goal of reestablishing the purity of Islam, and a crucial aspect of this reformation for him was restoring the place of jihad, holy war, at the center of Islamic life. He emphasized the importance of jihad—of actual warfare—in the Quran by pointing to the verses that command Muslims:

Fight in the way of God against those who fight against you, but do not commit aggression. . . . Slay them wheresoever ye find them and expel them from whence they have expelled you, for sedition is more grievous than slaying. . . . Fight against them until sedition is no more and allegiance is rendered to God alone; but if they make an end, then no aggression save against the evildoers. (Sura 2:190)

And again:

When the sacred months are over, kill those who ascribe partners to God wheresoever ye find them; seize them, encompass them, and ambush them; then if they repent and observe prayer and pay the alms, let them go their way. (Sura 9:5)

The mainstream Sunni view in ibn Taymiyya's time was that there were two kinds of jihad. The first was "offensive" jihad, to expand the geographical realm of Islam—to subdue infidels beyond existing borders and bring them the faith. This jihad was a duty of the entire community, to be carried out by an army of able-bodied men who would fight on behalf of their fellow Muslims. To wage jihad was the obligation of the legitimate political authority, who was enjoined to lead his army on this holy task at least once a year. He could agree to truces, as Muhammad did, for as long as ten years if prospects for a successful campaign were doubtful, but the ruler was required to resume hostilities when the balance of power shifted back in the Muslims' favor. This jihad could be authorized only by a recognized leader such as the caliph. Freelancing was prohibited. The second form of jihad was "defensive." If Muslim territory was attacked, jihad was no longer a corporate duty but an individual one. Every male had a duty to join the fight and drive out the infidel.

Breaking with the authorities of his day, ibn Taymiyya placed jihad on the same level as the "five pillars" of Islam: prayer, pilgrimage, alms, the declaration of faith ("There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his

prophet”), and the fast of Ramadan. Most clerics did not regard participation in jihad as a sine qua non of piety. Ibn Taymiyya again returned to scripture: he argued that since prayer and jihad were such important themes in early, authoritative narratives about Muhammad, clearly these activities were God’s two essential requirements for all conscientious, able-bodied Muslims. The goal of jihad is God’s victory; anyone who opposes jihad is therefore an enemy of God.

Elaborating on the ideas of others, ibn Taymiyya took a further step by holding that the rebellions and heresies that had come to dominate politics after the reign of the rightly guided caliphs might necessitate jihad not only against external opponents, but also against enemies within the realm of Islam, in order to preserve the unity of the umma. Traditionally, jihad had not been considered appropriate for dealing with rebels, who might, after all, have a legitimate grievance against an impious or irresponsible ruler. Nor was it employed against brigands. Jihad against apostates, however, was another matter: the Quran makes clear that the punishment for apostasy is death, and already in the early ninth century, the caliph al-Mamun had recognized the political utility of this distinction and accused his rival (and brother) al-Amin of apostasy to justify jihad against him. Power, not faith, was at stake, but jihad was nevertheless a useful instrument. Ibn Taymiyya grasped the same principle, but applied it for more explicitly religious purposes. By asserting that jihad against apostates within the realm of Islam is justified—by turning jihad inward and reforging it into a weapon for use against Muslims as well as infidels—he planted a seed of revolutionary violence in the heart of Islamic thought.

To those in power, ibn Taymiyya’s ideas were troublesome but useful. Twice the ruling sultans enlisted him to incite his fellow Muslims to jihad. The first time, in 1298, was against so-called Little Armenia, at that time a Mongol vassal state of Christian faith. The second, more fateful occasion, came in 1303, when the Mamluk sultan ordered ibn Taymiyya to draft a fatwa that would justify a jihad against the Mongols and then preach the message with all the fire he could summon in Cairo. The spe-

cific target of the fatwa was to be Muzaffar, prince of Mardin, a fortified Arab city that guarded important trade routes in northern Mesopotamia. Muzaffar, a Muslim, served at the behest of Mongol overlords.

From an Islamic perspective, jihad against the Mongols was not a straightforward matter. Since the khan Mahmud Ghazan had converted to Islam in 1295, the challenger to Mamluk hegemony in the Middle East had been transformed from pagan to fellow Muslim. Evidence from the period suggests that the Mongol leadership met the barest requirement of conversion at the time, the simple declaration of faith: there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet. The Mamluk sultan thus faced the conundrum that the Mongols, now Muslims, could not be subjected to jihad. Without the rallying force of a call to jihad, the sultan would be unable to mobilize his subjects to fight the approaching horde. Indeed, in 1299 Mamluk warriors abandoned a battlefield when word spread that the Mongol enemy had converted to Islam.

For ibn Taymiyya, the sultan's request was a perfect opportunity to put his thoughts into action. In his fatwa, he accused Muzaffar of ruling his Muslim subjects not according to sharia, Islamic law, but with infidel laws—the Yasa, the Mongol code of customary law that regulated personal status and set penalties for crimes—thus leading Muslims away from the faith. In short, ibn Taymiyya argued, Muzaffar had committed apostasy, a crime punishable by death.

The fatwa served its purpose. The jihad against the Mongols was successful. This campaign marked the end of the Mongol threat to Syria, and Ghazan died the year after the battle. Disputes over succession, failure to develop bureaucratic institutions, and loss of their military edge combined to diminish Mongol power.

The Mamluk regime survived until 1517, when the Ottoman Turks marched into Egypt. Ibn Taymiyya's work eventually fell out of favor, especially after the collapse of Mamluk power, but his insistence on the believer's experience of the holy texts has echoed down through the ages—louder in some eras, such as the present, than in others. Bundled together with his most famous text, the fatwa against the Mongols, and his

assertion that Muslim rulers' legitimacy depends upon their piety and use of sharia in governing, he left behind a set of ideas that adherents centuries later would use to catastrophic effect.

In the eighteenth century, a spiritual descendant of ibn Taymiyya emerged in Arabia, then a backwater of the Ottoman Empire: Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was born in 1703, the son and grandson of judges, in the then teeming town of al-Uyaina. A studious and devout young man, he developed early on a reputation for extreme ideas. He completed his initial religious education in Medina, then visited seminaries in Basra, where he was thrown out after condemning the population for apostasy, and Baghdad. He traveled east to Kurdistan and Iran, where he studied in the academies of Isfahan and Qom.

His experimentation with different approaches to Islam eventually led him to formulate what he regarded as an unadulterated Islam, stripped of innovation and true to his conception of early Muslim practice. Not surprisingly, ibn Abd al-Wahhab was drawn to the works of ibn Taymiyya, and he did much to restore his predecessor's prestige among his own followers, who would be known as Wahhabis, as well as among later activists in Egypt and South Asia inspired by the Wahhabi movement. Ibn Taymiyya's emphasis on the most ancient Islamic sources—the Quran and hadith—fit well with ibn Abd al-Wahhab's desire for a back-to-basics religion that rejected practices introduced after the days of the salaf, the men of old. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab excoriated folk customs such as visiting tombs, leaving food offerings for the dead, or venerating saints, which he took to be "innovation," one of the gravest steps a Muslim could take, for it led inevitably to sin. Against those who committed such offenses, he proclaimed takfir and demanded they be put to death. Muslim society, he believed, had become like the age of barbarism that preceded the Prophet, and renewal and purification were an imperative. According to ibn Abd al-Wahhab's code, delivering a legal ruling on the basis of something other than the Quran and hadith was apostasy, as were vows invoking a

being apart from Allah, denial of predestination, profiting from trade, interpreting the Quran in a figurative manner, failing to attend public prayers, and shaving one's beard. And, as ibn Taymiyya had insisted four hundred years earlier, the profession of the double creed—"There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet"—did not suffice to make a person a Muslim.

In eighteenth-century Arabia, general religious observance was anything but strict, so ibn Abd al-Wahhab was destined to make enemies, especially once he set to vandalizing popular shrines. Finally he exhausted the patience of the local tribal leaders and was run out of al-Uyaina in 1744. He fled to the rustic village of Dariya, not far from modern Riyadh, at the invitation of the sympathetic wife of the ruling sheikh there, Muhammad ibn Saud. Ibn Saud recognized that his guest had made converts as well as enemies and was capable of arousing the Arab tribes' fervor. He hoped to harness ibn Abd al-Wahhab's religious passion and popular appeal to advance his own goal of political and territorial predominance in central Arabia. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab sought ibn Saud's help for his own mission of reform. An alliance of power and faith was born. This new force pressed its ambitions vigorously. By the time of ibn Saud's death in 1765, the entire central Arabian plateau was under their control except for Riyadh, which fell eight years later.

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab died in 1792 at the age of ninety and, in keeping with his abhorrence of the veneration of shrines, was buried in an unmarked grave. Yet his descendants and ibn Saud's continued the campaign to control Arabia. Out of the two-hundred-year religio-political crusade they began came Saudi Wahhabism, Islam's most rigid and puritanical branch. By 1814, they had taken the Hejaz and occupied Mecca. To the north, they raided Damascus. To the east, they reached Qatar and captured al-Hasa (now the Eastern Province), wrecking the Shiite shrines throughout the area. To the south, they seized the towns up to the edge of the Empty Quarter.

Their raids drew the anger of the Ottoman rulers, whose Egyptian governor, Muhammad Ali, and his son Tusun temporarily halted the

Saudi ascendance in a series of battles. The Wahhabi-Saudi alliance surged again in the 1840s and, except for a brief setback toward the end of the nineteenth century, it has maintained control over most of the Arabian peninsula ever since.

A few glimpses from history suggest the ferocity that was bred of this marriage of religious zeal and territorial conquest: in 1802, members of the Ikhwan, the militia of fighters drawn from the tribes of the central Arabian region called the Nejd, destroyed the Prophet's tomb in Medina and, in a fury of iconoclasm, battered the idols that worshipers had placed there. The Ikhwan prevented pilgrims from visiting the holy sites because the visitors were, by Wahhabi lights, defiling them through idolatry. During the subsequent hajj, Wahhabi fighters slaughtered forty members of an Egyptian caravan bringing the black silk *kiswa*, an immense curtain used to cover the Kaaba during pilgrimages to Mecca. That ended a long Egyptian tradition of supplying the *kiswa*, which the Saudis themselves have provided ever since.

For Islamic civilization as a whole, the modern period brought decline and humiliation. This history has been much recounted: after the defeat of the Ottomans at the gates of Vienna in 1683, the territory belonging to Islam was slowly eroded. European power galloped ahead during the industrial revolution, and an inversion resulted: centuries in which Baghdad, Cairo, and Muslim Spain were the preeminent centers of learning and culture ended, and the European ascendancy began. In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Britain and France extended their empires deep into the heartland of Islam, and Ottoman Turkey became "the sick man of Europe," a great power in decay. Islamic thought reflected this sense of beleaguerment: the concept of jihad took on a new meaning. Now, instead of denoting exclusively actual, physical warfare, it came to mean a struggle against evil impulses within the soul of a believer. Acts of charity, good works in society, and education all came to be seen as part of this effort. This domestication of jihad resembles the pacifist

approach of the early Christians and Israelites in certain periods of their history; in a time of weakness, avoiding warfare is a sensible strategy. So the notion of the greater and lesser jihads became widespread: the greater jihad was the internal battle. The lesser was the military jihad, which was denigrated by the establishment of this hierarchy.*

The desire to re-create the golden age of the first generations of Muslims, the *salaf*, reemerged in the ferment of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as nationalism and anticolonial sentiment swept the great European empires. The urge to return to fundamentals, to re-create the age of piety and glory, appeared earliest in Egypt and India, the first two countries with large Muslim populations to feel the full impact of Western culture and political power. At the time, the dominant intellectual discussion was about how the Islamic world might adapt and modernize, and many thinkers sought to show how Islamic practices and values could be reconciled with Western political and social institutions. For modernizers, passages in the the Quran and hadith that dealt with interactions among Muslims could be interpreted in the light of new realities, thus opening the way to reforms in which the challenges of modern life and religious ideals could be reconciled. Reason could show that the

* Ibn Taymiyya would not have recognized the modern-day distinction between "greater jihad," the struggle for spiritual excellence, and "lesser jihad," the waging of war against Islam's enemies, cf. Omar A. Farrukh (trans.), *Ibn Taymiyya on Public and Private Law in Islam* (Beirut: Khayats, 1966), 135-61. Along with his contemporaries, he considered the superior form of jihad to be combat against infidels. Spiritual jihad was important as preparation for the more physically demanding kind of jihad. This classical emphasis on jihad as warfare has been adopted enthusiastically by contemporary militants, who reject more recent Sufic and apologetic assertions that spiritual jihad is the authentic jihad.

The last century has seen a trend toward interpretation of the so-called greater jihad as the more genuine form of Islamic struggle. The terminology comes from a hadith of disputed reliability in which Muhammad is reported to have said, upon returning from battle, that he has now returned from the lesser jihad to the greater, spiritual, jihad. Until recently, however, Muslim scholars were unanimous in insisting on the priority jihad had as warfare against the unbeliever. Bernard Lewis made this case most famously, but modern scholarly consensus on the matter is summed up by the new edition of the *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, cf. B. Lewis, Ch. Pellat, J. Schacht, eds., "Djihad," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (New Edition), Vol. II (Leiden: E. J. Brill), 538-40. It is worth noting that all of the 199 references to jihad in the most authoritative hadith collection speak of jihad only as warfare, cf. Douglas Streusand, "What Does Jihad Mean?," *Middle East Quarterly*, September 1997.

sequestering of women from the public was un-Islamic, that polygamy could be prohibited, and that bank interest could be earned without being untrue to the faith. The ancient institution of the *shura*, the consultative assembly, could be adapted to justify democracy. Education could produce Muslim leaders who were at home with Western ideas, while knowledgeable about and committed to their Muslim identity.

With the decline of the Ottoman Empire, the standard-bearer of Islam, and its dismemberment after World War I by the victorious Europeans, the search of Egyptian political leaders and social theorists for models that would bring their country to a position of parity with the colonial powers continued amid more dispiriting circumstances. A Cairo intellectual named Rashid Rida (1866–1935) argued that only a *salafiyya* Islam, an Islam purged of impurities and Western influences, could save Muslims from subordination to the colonial powers. Rida was from a landholding family near Tripoli, in what was then Ottoman Syria. He had been educated at a progressive Islamic school that offered both religious instruction and secular education. The late nineteenth century saw greater European economic penetration of Mediterranean lands, which had a profound effect on landowning families like Rida's. The impact was greatest, however, in Egypt, where Rida spent most of his career. Some landowners grasped the opportunity offered by a larger market, but more did not, and suffered. Economic dislocation was accompanied by social disorientation as laws and customs changed in response to European influence. Rida detested the so-called Muslim rulers who substituted Western law for the sharia and “thus abolish supposedly distasteful penalties such as cutting off the hands of thieves or stoning adulterers and prostitutes. They replace them with man-made laws and penalties. He who does that has undeniably become an infidel.”²⁸

In his writings, Rida employed a Quranic term, *jahiliyya*, that Muhammad had used to characterize the ignorance of Arabian society before Allah's revelation. In the Quran, the word *jahiliyya* connotes barbarity. Rida deployed it for an altogether new purpose: to describe not the darkness of pre-Islamic Arabia, but the Muslim lands of his own age

that submitted to man-made law and ignored their patrimony of Islamic law. In 1914, Rida wrote, “The decisive judgment of *kufʿr* [rejection of Islam] is issued against those who do not rule by God’s revelation . . . [and against] those who reconcile their customary usage and interpretation with the Quran.”⁴ Rida justified his condemnation of secular government by quoting the Quran: “They who do not rule by that which God has revealed are the unbelievers” (Sura 5.44). Rida looked back to the age of the rightly guided caliphs for a model for the Islamic state of the future, and his reasoning would be adopted by generations of Islamists to come.

Rida’s belief that only a return to authentic Islam would bring Muslims political and economic power was the idea not of a lone intellectual but rather of a transitional figure—one who cleared the way for future radicalism. Beginning in 1928, a new popular movement, the Muslim Brothers, spread the idea as well. Hassan al-Banna, a teacher from a small town in the Nile delta, formed the group to revive Islam and counter the debilitating effects of British colonial domination. He was driven by a sense of cultural catastrophe: the caliphate had been abolished in Turkey in 1924. Muslim leaders from all over came to meet at al-Azhar, the pre-eminent Islamic academy in Cairo, in 1926 to discuss reestablishing the institution. They failed, and public dismay was compounded by an official declaration of al-Azhar’s scholars that Muslims could not fulfill their Islamic identity in the absence of a true caliphate.

Al-Banna’s views clashed with the “Western” thinking that intellectuals in Egypt and elsewhere were beginning to espouse, such as the idea that modern forms of political organization, including Western democracy, which separates religion from politics, were compatible with Islamic principles. Al-Banna rejected this view, proposing instead to establish what he called a comprehensively Islamic “system.” Whether this was code for an Islamic state, and therefore a call for revolution, is still a matter of debate. The Muslim Brotherhood credo—“God is our objective; the Quran is our constitution; the Prophet is our leader; Struggle is our way; and death for the sake of God is the highest of our aspirations”—

suggests that he and the other founders of the Brotherhood had more in mind than an Islamic society within a secular state.

By the late 1930s, the group had grown rapidly and pioneered a means of proselytizing through community service. Three hundred Brotherhood branches were in operation, running schools, setting up infirmaries, and indoctrinating members through classes and lectures. Al-Banna was a true man of the twentieth century and understood well the importance of mass communications. The Brothers published a series of widely read newspapers and magazines; after one was shut down, another would open. In the *Majallat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn*, one of these publications, the Brothers asserted that they “would fight any politician or organization that did not work for the support of Islam or restoration of its glory.” Soon they were establishing factories and taking control of trade unions. That was the overt side of the organization. The Brotherhood also began infiltrating members into the armed forces and organizing paramilitary groups, or “phalanges,” with the apparent objective of seizing power at some time in the future.

In a pattern that would repeat itself frequently in different countries throughout the rest of the century, these new fundamentalists got the room they needed to spread their message and create this state within a state because of the belief of the government—in this case the Egyptian royal court, then ruling the country during the last phase of its colonial period and the first years of independence—that it could use the religious group to divide and conquer its political opponents. Compared to the secular parties that were agitating for independence and broader political participation, the Muslim Brothers appeared to represent little threat, so their activity usefully challenged other opposition parties.

That changed when the Brothers’ growth and clandestine military buildup emboldened them to confront the government and the British presence in Egypt. Beginning in 1948, they attacked British and Jewish businesses (or in some cases, firms that they mistakenly thought were owned by Jews) in an effort to accelerate Britain’s withdrawal from Egypt and protest Jewish settlement in Palestine. The nuisance they caused

outweighed their value to the government as a counter to the secular opposition, and King Farouk ordered the Brotherhood dismantled. It responded by assassinating his prime minister, Nuqrashi Pasha, late that year. The government retaliated by arranging the murder of Hassan al-Banna, who was gunned down in the street in February 1949. The killing of their leader and the government's ban sent the Brothers underground. Instead of discouraging them, though, it strengthened their hatred of Egypt's rulers. The group, which had some seventy-five thousand members at the time of al-Banna's killing, numbered well into the hundreds of thousands a decade later.

A conservative Islamic reaction to Western colonialism also emerged in India in the mid-nineteenth century. The emblem of this resurgence was the Dar ul-Ulum, "Realm of Learning," a seminary second in influence only to Egypt's al-Azhar. It was established in 1867 at Deoband, in the Indian province of Uttar Pradesh, to propagate the vision of the eighteenth-century theologian Shah Wali Allah and his Indian Wahhabi disciples. Dar ul Ulum became the wellspring of South Asian Islamic orthodoxy, and its alumni and their followers, still known as Deobandis, are committed to a strongly salafi conception of Islam.

Deobandi Islam provided the ideological framework for the ideas of important thinkers, including Abu al-Ala Maududi, a firebrand journalist who drew on the legacy of Indian Wahhabism and the writings of Rashid Rida to make the case for a Muslim society cleansed of Western influence and of corrupted Muslim traditions.

Muslims had enjoyed political hegemony in much of the Indian subcontinent for centuries and had established a mutually useful relationship with the British after their arrival in India in the early eighteenth century. In the years just after World War I, however, Indian nationalism, primarily Hindu in its leadership and expression, posed a growing challenge to British rule. In the course of World War II, Britain made it clear that India would receive its independence after the end of the conflict, and although

Maududi welcomed Britain's intention to withdraw because it would free Muslims from godless British law and administration, Indian independence raised the unwelcome prospect of Hindu rule over his coreligionists. It seemed to Maududi that either outcome—continued British administration or independence—would crush Muslim hopes for self-realization.

With the birth of Pakistan in 1947, Maududi left his home for the newly independent Muslim state, migrating in the same wave of humanity that carried 6.5 million other Indian Muslims. After settling in Lahore, he agitated for an Islamic state, not a merely Muslim one. What good, he demanded, would it do for Muslims to establish their own state only to be ruled by human law and partake in institutions devised by men? Surely, he reasoned, the purpose of an Islamic state was to live according to God's plan. Maududi made these points using terms invented by the notorious Kharijites more than twelve centuries before. Only God had "absolute sovereignty" and, as ibn Taymiyya insisted, it was not enough for rulers simply to sign up to the Islamic creed. Their legitimacy depended on their personal piety and, most important, their commitment to enforce a Quranic moral order in the lands under their control.

The imposition of this new/old order was a revolutionary task, but—as Maududi wrote, linking together an ancient religion with the political language of the age of communism and fascism—"Islam is a revolutionary ideology." The religion "seeks to alter the social order of the entire world and rebuild it in conformity with its own tenets and ideals. . . . 'Muslims' is the title of that 'International Revolutionary Party' organised by Islam to carry out its revolutionary program. 'Jihad' refers to the revolutionary struggle . . . to achieve this objective." Maududi would become one of the most important intellectual influences on the newly established Pakistan. The organization he had founded in India in 1941, the Jamaat i-Islami, was reestablished as a Pakistani political party with a kind of Leninist organizational structure. The revolution would be led by a sophisticated vanguard that would drive the masses forward into a new, genuinely Islamic order. The foremost religious party in the country, the Jamaat i-Islami commands the loyalty of millions of followers who oppose efforts

to liberalize the country's politics. Although the party has never come close to holding power, it has been a formidable source of Islamist ideas and energy, especially as religion became a more important source of legitimacy for both elected and military governments from the 1970s on.

When independence finally came to Egypt after World War II, the Cold War had already begun. Countries were taking sides, especially the newly decolonized states of the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa. Despite Rida and the Muslim Brotherhood, Egyptian elites still looked to contemporary models for their new state, not to visions drawn from a distant past. Within this Third World, socialism enjoyed a broad appeal. When Gamal Abdel Nasser and other "Free Officers" deposed King Farouk in the 1952 military coup, the new leaders chose to align themselves with the Soviet Union in foreign relations and to establish a planned economy and police state to control internal affairs. Like most of the newly independent Arab countries, the Egyptian regime was secularist but relied on Islamic groups and symbols—the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, the Kaaba in Mecca, great military battles from the centuries past—to strengthen its hold on power. The Muslim Brothers, who had survived their confrontation with the authorities and the death of the charismatic Hassan al-Banna, were hopeful about the new regime and established a tactical alliance with the military officers who had engineered the revolt. But the two groups had irreconcilable visions of Egypt's future. Revolutionary Arab nationalism, not Islamic orthodoxy, was the rallying cry of the Free Officers. When the Brothers realized that Nasser was using them—much as they were trying to use him—they considered assassinating him. In a remarkable foreshadowing of terrorist attacks decades in the future, they devised a plot involving a suicide bomber and an explosive vest. At the time, there were no takers, but the Brothers' determination to act intensified with the announcement of the Suez Canal Evacuation Treaty with Britain, which the Brothers bitterly opposed. Eventually they found a willing assassin in the person of Muhammad Abd al-Latif, a poor tinsmith, who fired several

shots in Nasser's direction at one of the regime's mass rallies in Alexandria in 1954. The failed attempt was heard live on radio. The government's response was swift and brutal: hundreds of Muslim Brothers were incarcerated in the regime's concentration camp-like prisons. There they were tortured, and many were executed.

One of the Brothers imprisoned was Sayyid Qutb, a writer and former government official. At first, Nasser's courtship of the Muslim Brothers and the regime's rhetorical call for an Islamic revolution had attracted Qutb. He accepted a post as adviser on curricular reform, met with Nasser, and even became a liaison between the Brothers and the Revolutionary Command Council, Egypt's equivalent of the Politburo. He appears genuinely to have believed that Nasser was committed to establishing an Islamic state. When the break between the Brothers and the regime came, he must have been emotionally crushed, and he soon found himself in unimaginably hellish surroundings. Qutb was sentenced to fifteen years at hard labor. He was briefly released in 1964. The next year, he was re-arrested, tried, and hanged. In the brutal world of detention camps and prison hospitals, he developed his essential ideas, producing a large corpus of writings that include a massive commentary on the Quran and numerous essays.

In a century in which some of the most important writing came out of prisons, Qutb, for better or worse, is the Islamic world's answer to Solzhenitsyn, Sartre, and Havel, and he easily ranks with all of them in influence. It was Sayyid Qutb who fused together the core elements of modern Islamism: the Kharjites' takfir, ibn Taymiyya's fatwas and policy prescriptions, Rashid Rida's salafism, Maududi's concept of the contemporary jahiliyya and Hassan al-Banna's political activism. In conditions that proved to him beyond refutation the horror of government by man-made laws, Qutb concluded that the unity of God and His sovereignty meant that human rule—government that legislates its own behavior—is illegitimate. Muslims must answer to God alone. Human government, even one that paid lip service to Islam, was apostate; the very presumption that there could be human rule over Muslims implied a denial of

God's authority over mankind and was therefore heretical. Such a government was the legitimate target of jihad. Only by destroying *jahili*—non-Islamic and therefore barbarous—rule could a truly Islamic society appear, one consistent with the beliefs and practices of the earliest, purest stage of the religion's development. The responsibility of jihad would fall to a vanguard of true believers, who would kill the jahili rulers and lead fellow Muslims into a new golden age. Today, Qutb's works are staples of bookshops throughout the Middle East, and his manifesto, *Signposts*, is one of the most influential works in Arabic of the last half century. Years later it would even become an important text for Shiite revolutionaries in Iran, and passages were translated into Farsi by Ali Khamenei, now the Supreme Leader of the country. Qutb's martyrdom has been an inspiration to successive generations of disciples—for whom there is even a special word in Arabic, *Qutbiyyun*, which can be rendered in English as Qutbites. He is the source.

The son of a pious teacher in a rural upper-Egyptian town in Minya province, Qutb traveled in his early years along an intellectual and political trajectory typical of a generation of Egyptian activists. He was at first enamored of the West but grew disenchanted as Egypt pursued a program of secular modernization and still saw its woes multiply after World War II. He was working as a school inspector in 1948 when the Ministry of Education sent him to the United States for a fact-finding mission and to improve his English. Rigidly religious, prudish, and already growing suspicious of the West as morally corrupting, Qutb was destined for an unhappy experience. During his ocean crossing, an encounter one night with an amorous and tipsy woman—from whom he recoiled in shock—got him off to a bad start and became a symbol of the trip, which was more than a year long. In America, he felt engulfed by licentiousness, racism, and a popular admiration for Israel that disgusted him. His visits to New York City and Washington, D.C., and his extended stay in Greeley, Colorado, where he lived while working for his master's degree in education at

Northern Colorado Teachers College, confirmed his judgment that American culture was empty and foul. His revulsion grew at the sight of the broad, well-kept lawns of Greeley, which typified for him an obsession with superficial and mindless individualism. He was repelled by churches that seemed to him to be competing with one another in the business of saving souls. When he saw men and women dancing to the current hit "Baby, It's Cold Outside," he reacted with a curdling disdain, writing that "the hall swarmed with legs." Qutb returned to Egypt filled with loathing for the United States and convinced that Islam and Western values were fundamentally antagonistic. "Humanity today," he wrote, "is living in a large brothel! One has only to glance at its press, films, fashion shows, beauty contests, ballrooms, wine bars, and broadcasting stations! Or observe its mad lust for naked flesh, provocative pictures, and sick, suggestive statements in literature, the arts, and mass media! And add to all this the system of usury which fuels man's voracity for money and engenders vile methods for its accumulation and investment, in addition to fraud, trickery, and blackmail dressed up in the garb of law."⁵

At the heart of Qutb's thought was a powerful dualism: the barbarous and the godly. Drawing on ibn Taymiyya and Maududi, Qutb transformed the term *jahiliyya* from a shorthand description of the world of pre-Islamic seventh-century Arabia into something far more charged, turning it from a pejorative into a metaphysical category. Maududi, whose works were published in Cairo in 1951, used the word to refer to foreign ideas and conventions that distorted Islam or denied the rule of God. For Qutb, *jahiliyya* was a more oppressive, poisonous, and ubiquitous aspect of existence. It stood for a moral corruption that was not limited to a specific place and time but that had darkened all times and places since the eclipse of Muhammad's ideal community of Muslims in mid-seventh-century Arabia. "Everything around us is *Jahiliyya*," Qutb would write, "people's perceptions and beliefs, habits and customs, the sources of their culture, arts and literature, and their laws and legislations."⁶ Like ibn Taymiyya and ibn Abd al-Wahhab, Qutb did not shy from condemning "much of what we think of as Islamic culture, Islamic sources or Is-

lamic philosophy,” which was “in fact the making of Jahiliyya.”⁷ He put before Muslims an immense existential choice, for those who wanted to lead a correct Islamic life could not have it both ways: “Islam cannot accept any compromise with Jahiliyya. . . . Either Islam will remain, or Jahiliyya; Islam cannot accept or agree to a situation which is half Islam and half Jahiliyya. In this respect, Islam’s stand is very clear. It says that truth is one and cannot be divided; if it is not the truth, than it must be falsehood. The mixing and coexistence of truth and falsehood is impossible. Command belongs to Allah or else to Jahiliyya. The Sharia of Allah with prevail, or else people’s desires.”⁸

If all around one is jahiliyya, seductive, debasing, and forbidden, how can the ordinary, decent Muslim save his soul? Qutb prescribed harsh measures, demanding a separation from “all the influences of Jahiliyya in which we live and from which we derive our benefits.” Given the realities of daily life, this could not be a severance of all ties, but rather a drawing of boundaries and a spiritual removal from one’s jahili surroundings. Immersion in the Quran is a crucial first step toward this separation. This internal migration would imitate Muhammad’s Hijra, the flight from Mecca to Medina. In this withdrawal would be the genesis of dramatic change. Once the community of true Muslims was strong enough, it would form a revolutionary vanguard. Jihad could then be waged against jahili rulers and the reform of Islamic society would be carried out.

For Qutb, the only path for a truly Islamic society was to accept the unlimited suzerainty of God over communal and personal existence. But the restoration of this absolute sovereignty—Qutb uses the term for God’s rule that originated with the Kharijites and that figures prominently in ibn Taymiyya and Maududi—requires the believers to rebel, to wrest power from those who exercise it for human and not divine ends. Qutb leaves no doubt about the scope of this task, which entails “a full revolt against human rulership in all its shapes and forms, systems and arrangements. . . . It means destroying the kingdom of man to establish the kingdom of heaven on earth.”⁹ This can only be attained through jihad. The Muslim Brothers sought to create their “Islamic system” from

the ground up, using the provision of social services and education to bring the masses over to their vision. But this approach was grounded in the illusion that the jahili rulers would eventually cede their positions as Egyptians became more pious.¹⁰ This would never happen, Qutb declared. A radical, violent break was required.

If Qutb's equation of modern secularism with jahiliyya placed contemporary Muslims in a moral universe like that of the seventh century, his view of the West replayed the era of the great Crusades. In fact, for Qutb virtually every confrontation between the worlds of Islam and the West is a repetition of the conflicts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In his writings, "the Crusades" are an ancient and perpetual antagonism, unconfined by specifics of time and place. Whether he speaks of Byzantine resistance to Muslim conquerors in the seventh century or the coming of the colonial powers in the nineteenth century, all are manifestations of the Crusades. If anyone argues that the source of Western enmity toward Islam is Jewish money, British ambition, or American guile, he replies: "All these opinions overlook one vital element . . . the Crusader spirit which runs in the blood of all westerners."¹¹

Qutb draws another theme from ibn Taymiyya's well that would influence modern radicals: intense anti-Semitism. In the early and medieval Islamic periods, Jews and Christians were, for the most part, treated relatively well. They were "people of the book"—monotheists whose beliefs were drawn from sacred scriptures, even if they did not accept Muhammad's prophecy. They benefited from certain privileges, in return for paying a poll tax, keeping their religious practices out of sight, abstaining from proselytizing, and, in the case of Jews, wearing distinctive clothing in public. Jews and Christians were officially barred from some professions, the senior ranks of the bureaucracy, and the army. Exceptions to these restrictions were not uncommon and, on the whole, Jews fared better in Muslim lands than in Christian Europe, where atrocious persecution was common.

The Quran offers texts to justify a range of attitudes toward Jews. In some passages, Muhammad sharply criticizes the Jews because they re-

fused his call to Islam. They are accused of subverting and falsifying their own scripture and rejecting their own prophets, as well as Jesus and, of course, Muhammad himself. Violent clashes that led to the destruction of the Jewish community of Medina at the hands of Muhammad and his followers are also depicted. Yet there are also contrasting verses that portray Jews in a more favorable light, creating a picture of normal interaction between Jewish and Muslim communities in Arabia during Muhammad's early years. (Ibn Ishaq, one of the first biographers of Muhammad, writing within a century of the Prophet's death, recorded that Jews were initially considered to be part of the *umma*.)¹² Perhaps the most important aspect of Muslim-Jewish relations before the twentieth century is how negative Quranic portrayals of Jews were interpreted. Unlike the Catholic Church, which until the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s identified all Jews with those who are alleged by the Gospels to have rejected Jesus and caused him to be crucified, Muslims did not view the Jews of Medina as progenitors of a line of eternal traitors, and they bore no special hatred for Jews of later generations.

In his time, ibn Taymiyya exemplified a trend toward harsher treatment of the Jews and Christians within Mamluk domains. Mamluk rulers, who came from the Turkish lands north of the Caspian and Black Seas, were outsiders in the Arab world without a sense of the long history of Muslim toleration for Jews and the obligation to protect *dhimmis*, "people of privilege." As outsiders with only a shallow Islamic education, they were deaf to customary practice, instead taking their cues from passages in the Quran that stigmatized Christians and Jews and discouraged social contact. Ibn Taymiyya came of age in an atmosphere of increasing intolerance, and he fostered it. Indeed, he first made a name for himself by demanding the death penalty for a Christian in Damascus who was accused of insulting the Quran. In his writings about the Jews, he argued that their cruelty toward the prophets, their rejection of God's truth in the form of Muhammad's call, their treatment of Jesus, and their untrustworthiness and stinginess effectively invalidated their status as *dhimmis*. He issued a fatwa overturning an existing Islamic law that prohibited Muslims from

cursing or insulting Jewish holy books and insisted upon stringent enforcement of the strictures on Jews regarding clothing, holding positions of civil authority, and exhibiting their religion publicly. It was fortunate for the Jews of Damascus that ibn Taymiyya was not in power since he urged the death sentence for Jews guilty of some of these infractions.

Six hundred and fifty years later, Qutb adopted this stance with malicious vigor, taking it to incredible extremes. Jews, Qutb argued, conspired against Muslims from the earliest days and never ceased their plotting. Even worse, taking a gigantic step further, he contended that “anyone who leads this community away from its religion and its Quran can only be a Jewish agent”—in other words, any source of division, anyone who undermines the relationship between Muslims and their faith is by definition a Jew.¹³ The Jews thus become the incarnation of all that is anti-Islamic, and such is their supposed animosity that they will never relent “because the Jews will be satisfied only with destruction of this religion [Islam].” The struggle with the Jews will be a war without rules, since “from such creatures who kill, massacre and defame prophets one can only expect the spilling of human blood and dirty means which would further their machinations and evilness.” The Jews pose a danger that is more than physical. In a passage that looks back to *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and forward to Usama bin Laden, Qutb warns that the Jews’ “satanic usurious activity” will “deliver the proceeds of all human toil into the hands of the great usurious Jewish financial institutions.” They will rob the believers and kill them.¹⁴

Qutb’s views made their first lethal mark in Egypt ten years after he was hanged in a Cairo prison. For all the energy it mustered for persecuting its religious opponents, the regime failed to improve economic conditions or stand up militarily to Israel. In its inability to deliver basic improvements, Nasser’s Egypt set the pattern that created the conditions for a religious revival, as disenchantment with secular nationalism led the discontented to seek another, potentially more nourishing ideology. While the govern-

ment's Marxist approach fell short, its revolutionary rhetoric caught on. Discontent fueled a popular interest in Islam and a new revolution that would be genuinely Islamic, not the phony version peddled by those in power. There was a growing belief that a return to their authentic heritage—their true identity—would deliver independence, security, and prosperity to Muslims.

As Nasser's successor Anwar Sadat consolidated his power in Egypt during the 1970s, he dismantled his predecessor's domestic program and initiated an economic liberalization. In some quarters, this policy reversal was strongly resisted, especially in Egypt's burgeoning universities, where activists were still committed to Nasser's pan-Arab socialism. To counter the opposition, Sadat lifted legal restrictions and eased police pressure on Islamic student unions, which he believed would drive the Nasserists out of the universities through propaganda and physical violence. This stratagem, much like Farouk's use of the Muslim Brothers, succeeded in the short run. Over the longer term, Sadat's tactics nurtured terrorist groups for whom kicking the leftists off campus was just the beginning.

The first to undertake the cause of the Islamic revolution was Salih Siriyya's Shabab Muhammad, "Muhammad's Young Men." Siriyya, a Palestinian militant, was living in Jordan in 1970 when Yasir Arafat led Palestinian forces in the "Black September" revolt against the government of King Hussein. With the suppression of the revolt by King Hussein's Bedouin army, Siriyya escaped to Iraq. There, he soon came under suspicion, so he fled to Egypt in 1971, where he found a job as an Arab League bureaucrat and fell in with the leadership of the Muslim Brothers. At the time, the Brothers must have seemed timid to Siriyya. Six years after Sayyid Qutb had been put to death in Nasser's drive to destroy the Brothers, they were not going to risk offending the Sadat regime; they stuck to a strategy of grassroots work to build a new Islamic society. For Siriyya, this incrementalism doomed the Brothers to irrelevance. Real change could come only through coup d'état.

Siriyya cast his spell over a small group of students in Cairo and

Alexandria, formed his own revolutionary cadre, and drew up a plan for toppling Sadat. He resolved to storm the Technical Military Academy in Heliopolis, a suburb of Cairo, and with weapons and vehicles captured there, deploy as many as a hundred militants, including cadets studying at the academy. The fighters would then attack the Arab Socialist Union building in central Cairo, where Sadat was attending an official event. Whether the President and his companions were to be arrested or killed outright remains unclear, like many details of the conspiracy. In the last phase of the coup, Siriyya's forces intended to capture the television station and declare the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Egypt.

The execution of the plan was a botch. The attempt to seize the military academy fizzled quickly when the conspirators came under fire from guards at the academy's armory, and the entire conspiracy collapsed in Heliopolis; Sadat was never in any danger. Siriyya and his top assistant were captured and executed, and twenty-nine members of his band were jailed. Many others, however, were freed and soon gravitated to other radical circles then forming.

One group that rivaled Shabab Muhammad was dubbed al-Takfir wal-Hijra—"Condemn and Emigrate"—by the police and media. As a shorthand description of the group's program, this served the public relations purposes of the Egyptian regime, since it highlighted two aspects of the group's beliefs that were most alienating to ordinary Egyptians. It was also not inaccurate: the group's leader, a charismatic former Muslim Brother and disciple of Sayyid Qutb named Shuqri Mustafa, believed his band's duty was to proclaim the apostasy of Egyptian society—to declare it takfir. In his manifesto, *The Caliphate*, he proclaimed that "all that is seen before you now on earth of men and women, of money, soldiers, arms and ploys, of constitutions and laws, wars and conciliations . . . represents a front for God's enemies, led by evil on earth. . . . Within this reality a man will come who, together with the believers who would follow him, will erase this reality, fight the infidel entity and establish the Islamic body."¹⁵ But the apostate power was still too strong to defeat in battle, so the group had to separate itself from Egyptian society—to emi-

grate internally in imitation of Muhammad's flight from Mecca. Ultimately, the group believed, its members' exemplary living would attract a mass of penitents, who together could wage jihad against the jahili state.

The group called itself al-Jamaat al-Muslinin, "The Islamic Group," because adherents considered themselves to be the only true Muslims in an overwhelmingly jahili society. They were known also as "the people of the cave," because of a brief period in which they experimented with a hermitlike existence in the desert. They were more frequently called *takfiris*, "those who condemn," and separation was necessary for them because anything beyond the barest contact with the barbarousness of contemporary life threatened to corrupt these young, authentic Muslims.¹⁶

The takfiris were seized with a messianic fervor. Members believed that Shuqri was the Mahdi, the long-awaited messiah who would be the savior of Islam; in photographs from that time, he has the Mansonesque stare of a man certain of his own apocalyptic role. The group's ultimate objective was the reconstitution of the caliphate, a restoration of the golden age, and the establishment of Islamic rule over the entire world. It forecast the emergence of an Islamic superpower that would challenge the United States and Soviet Union and ultimately replace them as the dominant power on earth. The members shared a sense of profound crisis and thought they had detected signs of the coming end of time: deep divisions in society, growing political disorder, and widespread apostasy. The moment required action by the few true Muslims to hasten the beginning of divine rule.

The takfiris' emergence was possible because of the Sadat government's use of Islamic groups as a counterweight to Nasserite leftists, but as their leaders became more paranoid and prone to violence, the band became a target of the secret police. Shuqri's conviction that his group was the only body of true Muslims meant that a decision to leave the group—and there were many who sought to escape his tyrannical behavior—was apostasy and punishable by death. As Shuqri began pronouncing sentences on those who wanted to break with the group, disillusioned members decided it was time to cooperate with the police. Internal security

agents had no trouble infiltrating the group. Growing police interest and negative publicity in the press strengthened the takfiris' sense of impending catastrophe.

The pressure increased when Shuqri ordered his followers to carry out death sentences on two particular renegades. The attempt was disrupted by police who were either watching the group or were tipped off by one of the intended victims. Shuqri became a wanted man, vilified in the media and hunted by the authorities. Egyptian security forces were now capturing members of the shrinking group and holding them without charge.

In desperation, Shuqri abandoned the strategy of withdrawal and decided to strike at the enemy. On July 3, 1977, the remnant of the group kidnapped Sheikh al-Dhahabi, a former dean of al-Azhar's secular and religious law faculties who was then the government's minister of religious foundations, the entities that manage the budgets and facilities of mosques and religious schools. The sheikh was chosen because he had inveighed against Islamists in a publication circulated the year before. His larger crime, however, was to be a prominent representative of the establishment clergy, who were paid by the government and could be counted on to support it. Shuqri—like other militants in Egypt—blamed these ulema for cooperating with the regime and thus helping to uphold the jahili state. Because they used their authority to seduce innocent Muslims away from the truth, these clerics were the most egregious of apostates. They diverted Muslims from the text of the Quran, which was in an Arabic that any Egyptian could understand, insisting that a valid understanding of God's word depended above all on the official clergy's exclusive ability to cite the commentaries of the great medieval schools of scriptural interpretation. As far as Shuqri was concerned, the clerics were simply protecting their prerogatives and concealing their intellectual cowardice. Even worse, he argued, this practice set the great commentators up as idols, competing with God and the Prophet. Those who relied upon these jurists were denying the oneness of Allah and deserved death.

For al-Dhahabi's release, Shuqri issued a bizarre set of demands:

200,000 Egyptian pounds, amnesty for his fellow group members, the printing of a communiqué in *The New York Times*, and a government commission to investigate the security services. When the regime refused, al-Dhahabi was executed. Shuqri was hunted down and caught, and his group was eventually dispersed. In the process, however, it made a lasting impression by engaging the security forces in a series of gunfights that left sixty dead or wounded.

When he appeared in court, Shuqri mocked the establishment clerics, their learning, and the state that supported them. He derided the ulama for their interpretation of jihad as an internal struggle to overcome one's evil impulses. Yes, he said, he knew the hadith in which the Prophet returns from the battlefield saying, "We have come home from the small jihad to the great jihad," but we all know it's from the least authoritative hadith compilation and therefore a forgery. The clerics were doubly discredited by the trial proceedings: not only were they being dismissed as puppets of the regime by the takfiri defendants, but the military prosecutors pinned the blame for the takfiri phenomenon on the clergy's failure as educators. How, the prosecutors asked, could the institution responsible for the religious instruction of the country's youth have allowed Shuqri's heretical beliefs to gain such a following in the universities?

The outcome of the trial was never in doubt. Shuqri was executed in 1978 at the age of thirty-seven, along with four other takfiris. But the trial badly discredited the ulama, who were already a weakened force for moderation in an increasingly radicalized Egypt.

In the campus ferment of the mid-1970s, another group emerged that shared many of Jamaat i-Islami's goals but operated with different methods and ideology: the Jamaat al-Jihad. The new group was galvanized by two events that occurred after Shuqri Mustafa's execution: the first was Anwar Sadat's decision to make peace with Israel. To these fundamentalists, an agreement with the Jews that validated infidel occupation of Muslim land was inexcusable. The clerics of al-Azhar justified the

peace agreement with Israel on scriptural grounds, citing Muhammad's agreement to a truce with his Meccan enemies in 628, but that only served to deepen contempt for the ulema among extremists, who saw them as the lapdogs of an impious ruler. The second was the 1979 enactment of a new secular law regulating family matters, which came after years of foot-dragging by the conservative religious opposition in the National Assembly. This government intrusion into family affairs was in some respects the greater outrage. Among other provisions, the law gave women the right to divorce if their husbands took other wives without their consent. It gave divorced mothers custody of children up to certain ages and entitled them to live in their ex-husband's home until they remarried or other arrangements were made. To Islamists, this guarantee to women of new rights not authorized by sharia was an affront that compromised a husband's authority over his wife and home. Moreover, the new family law's principal advocate was Jihan Sadat, the president's wife; as a woman, the radicals maintained, she had no role in such matters. The legal reform came after years of promises by the Egyptian regime to make national law conform to sharia, so it hardly counted as a good faith effort. These were tremendous provocations, and they inflamed the radicals' perception of an historic catastrophe, that Islam faced a world of unprecedented hostility. Spurred by Islamist successes in student union elections in the universities, student opposition to the government spread. Sadat responded by suspending the student unions, outlawing independent Islamic student associations, and stepping up arrests of young radicals.

The al-Jihad group began life as a more formidable organization than the Shabab Muhammad or al-Takfir wal-Hijra because it was led not by charismatics but by dedicated revolutionaries. Its intellectual guide was Muhammad Abd al-Salam Faraj, an electrical engineer who, like Shuqri Mustafa, had been a Muslim Brother until he was disillusioned by that organization's accommodation to the regime. His father had been a Ministry of Health employee with strong convictions that drew him to the Muslim Brothers and landed him repeatedly in prison. Advancing age

cooled his militancy, and he settled in a provincial capital, married well, and earned enough money to send his son to Cairo University.

After his education, Faraj settled in the outskirts of Cairo and around 1980 linked up with two brothers-in-law, Abbud Abd al-Latif al-Zumr, and Tariq Abd al-Mawjud al-Zumr. Theirs was an establishment family that had intermarried with leading clans and been important in politics before Nasser's revolution. One of Abbud's uncles was a general who had fallen in the October War of 1973; another was a member of Parliament. His father had been mayor of his village, and a number of relatives were army officers. Abbud himself was an army colonel, and he would handle security and special operations for the group. In its embryonic stage as a three-man cell, the group began to prepare for an Islamic revolution. This would not be accomplished in the style of Shuqri Mustafa, through the conversion of the masses over a long period of time. The revolution would come from above, led by a vanguard as in Salih Siriyya's vision of a takeover of the state by decapitating the regime.

A second wing of the group, bound to the Cairo cell through ties of friendship and kinship, formed in upper Egypt. The link was Muhammad Zuhdi, a fugitive from the town of Minya who was wanted for antigovernment activity and was hiding out in Cairo's University City dormitories. There, the al-Zumr brothers-in-law introduced him to Faraj. Zuhdi and Faraj shared a desire for action and set to work bringing together activists from the south with those in and around Cairo. Court documents later referred to the resulting organization as Tanzim Muhammad Abd al-Salam Faraj, or Tanzim al-Jihad. Not long after this connection was forged, Tanzim grew with the addition of a new faction led by another university graduate, Kamal al-Said Habib, from the College of Commerce. The last volunteer came from the southern town of Nag Hammadi: First Lieutenant Khalid Ahmed Shawqi al-Islambouli met Zuhdi in 1980 and joined the Tanzim in 1981. Al-Islambouli's family was a rural version of the al-Zumr family. His father was in-house counsel for a sugar factory, his uncle had been a judge, and many of his male relatives had law degrees; one family member served as chairman of the

district council and another was a senior army officer. These were not people brought low by poverty or seething with frustrated expectations.

Religious inspiration was provided to the group by Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, the Blind Sheikh. At the time, he was in his early forties, a family man with two wives and eight children. Like most of the conspirators from northern Egypt, Rahman came from the outer edges of Cairo, a sprawling region that was neither rural nor as densely urban as central Cairo. Although he had been sightless from childhood, his determination carried him through the doctoral program at al-Azhar, where he won a degree in Quranic exegesis in 1972. This same resolve brought him into conflict with Nasser's state. By his early thirties, he had already served a nine-month sentence in solitary confinement at the notorious Qala prison and been under house arrest. When Sadat came to power and attempted to enlist the Islamic opposition in the battle against the left, Rahman was rehabilitated—against the wishes of the internal security service, which considered the cleric to be trouble in waiting. In 1973, Rahman was permitted to take up a lectureship on the theology faculty of al-Azhar's Asyut campus in southern Egypt. There he met Zuhdi and his fellow Tanzim and, through them, Faraj.

As the group developed, day-to-day leadership was provided by committees, which took decisions in concert with a majlis al-shura, or consultative council. The majlis had one committee for recruitment, another to coordinate logistical support, and a third to manage finances. Cells in Cairo met regularly to plot strategy and coordinate operational matters. The recruitment of new members and the formation of cells were centered in radical mosques: new members were drawn from among the most devout young worshipers. Those selected were invited to more exclusive study sessions with an imam linked to the group. These events were known as retreats—another allusion to the notion of hijra, or migration, away from jahili society. A few participants would then get a smattering of training in unarmed combat and instruction in handling weapons and explosives. The group practiced a fairly sophisticated level

of tradecraft—thanks presumably to Abbud—in which information was strictly controlled and cover names and codes were used in communications. They maintained a discipline, summed up by the oath sworn by new recruits to “hear and obey,” that provided them with the secrecy to operate in a formidable police state. In addition to its regimentation, al-Jihad had another advantage over the takfiris. The latter’s separatist ideology led the group to limit its contact with other Egyptians and thereby preserve its spiritual purity. Al-Jihad, by contrast, did not believe that all of Egyptian society was submerged in the darkness of jahiliyya. Government leaders were the problem, not the Muslims over whom they ruled or even those whose salaries they paid. Since only the regime was designated as apostate—it was left to God to judge whether others in society had deviated from the true path—al-Jihad could recruit government workers, soldiers, intelligence operatives, and reporters. The security risk posed by this wider network was offset by two factors: the group continued to look to family relations or close friends for new members, and there was an opportunity for extended observation of recruits during the indoctrination phase in the mosque. This more flexible assessment of who was jahili and who was not also allowed al-Jihad to penetrate the Egyptian security services. The group’s conviction that the evil resided in the government led them to a further conclusion: the Egyptian people would support a revolutionary assault on the power structure of the state. Thus, there was no reason to postpone the slaying of the Pharaoh, as the Islamists called Sadat.

Al-Jihad thinking was set forth in a manifesto called *The Neglected Obligation (al-Faridah al-Ghaiba)*, written by the group’s commissar, Faraj. The book probably dates from 1980, the year he formed the Tanzim, and it is thought that about five hundred copies were privately printed. The title echoes ibn Taymiyya’s insistence on the crucial importance of jihad. Muslims satisfy themselves with observation of the five traditional pillars of the faith—declaration of faith, pilgrimage, prayer, alms, and the Ramadan fast—but they forsake what Faraj considered the sixth and most vital one, jihad. The electrician-cum-theologian quotes a

famous hadith concerning a man who converted to Islam in the presence of Muhammad, went out to fight in a jihad, and was immediately killed without having the opportunity to do the good and charitable things that are required of Muslims. When informed of the convert's fate, Muhammad said, "Nevertheless, his reward is great." Faraj took this as scriptural proof that jihad takes precedence over other duties. Like Shuqri Mustafa, he was intent on puncturing the notion that there exists a greater jihad of individual spiritual renewal that takes precedence over the lesser jihad of killing the enemies of God. Faraj also dismissed the classical legal requirement that only the caliph or emir can authorize jihad: he cited another hadith, in which the Prophet said, "When three go out, make one an emir." As for the relevance of the ulema's opinion on any of these matters, Faraj was contemptuous: the Muslim commanders who conquered the world "from Spain to India" were not great scholars; al-Azhar was not able to keep the French from invading Egypt in the nineteenth century; and anyone who does not believe that Islam was spread by the sword has not read the Quran, he declared.

The Neglected Obligation relies explicitly on Qutb and ibn Taymiyya and reads at times like the record of a debate within the group as it explores the way forward. Faraj ridicules the gradual approach to change advocated by the Muslim Brothers. He cites ibn Taymiyya's fatwa against the Mongols to show that jihad against those who merely call themselves Muslims is valid and that killing Muslims in pursuit of that goal is legitimate. He argues further that the use of stratagems of deceit for this purpose was approved by authoritative Muslim jurists. Those he invokes to create the impression of a clerical consensus are a who's who of the greatest jurists and generals of the golden age of Islam. He dismisses contemporary established ulema as nothing more than the salaried puppets of the state, with no authority over true Muslims.

His tract also provides a fascinating window into the group's debate about Israel, which he calls the "far enemy." Faraj maintains the "near enemy," apostate Muslim rulers, must be destroyed first. Then, the purified Islamic community can turn its guns against the "far enemy."

They barely had an idea of their original civilization.

—V. S. NAIPAUL, *A Bend in the River*¹⁷

Ideology tells us a great deal about these radicals, but so does sociology. We have seen how many of the leaders of al-Jihad came from backgrounds that were well-to-do or better. It is tempting to think that the leaders came from these ranks and that their followers were rabble—misfits and marginal characters seduced by a cause. But Saad Eddin Ibrahim, the eminent Egyptian social scientist who interviewed Shabab Muhammad survivors in prison, characterized them as well-educated “model young Egyptians,” mostly from cohesive lower-middle-class and middle-class families, where the head of household was a professional. The takfiri members also fit this profile. The statistical breakdown of those involved with al-Jihad is particularly revealing: the group was almost evenly split between students and nonstudents; about 40 percent of the latter were artisans or merchants, 17 percent professionals, 9 percent soldiers or policemen, 4 percent farmers, and only 5 percent unemployed. Of the students in al-Jihad, one-third were in engineering or medicine. In Siriyya’s “Military Academy” group, almost all of whom were students, nearly half were also studying those two subjects.

These numbers weaken any thesis that Egypt’s Islamist militants are the downtrodden rising up. They may well have class frustrations, and some have argued that the activists come from a stratum of society in which there is an inordinate disparity between education and a sense of entitlement on the one hand and actual opportunity on the other.¹⁸ But what is most striking is the phenomenon of so many well-trained, literate young men assuming the authority of religious interpretation. While his clerical authority was valued by al-Jihad, Sheikh Rahman is the outlier in a group whose chief theorist was an electrician. Qutb, Siriyya, Shuqri, and Faraj—all are autodidacts of one stripe or another. There are few clergy among these fundamentalists, but no shortage of willingness to determine—on the

basis of their own learning—what is God’s truth. Implicit in this is a disregard for generations of learning and religious authority, a repudiation that goes beyond the insistence of ibn Taymiyya on the individual struggle with the Quran and hadith.

One explanation for this phenomenon involves several major developments within the Islamic world over the last two centuries. According to Professor Richard Bulliet of Columbia University, a central tendency in the modernization that began with colonialism in the nineteenth century was a weakening of the traditional role of the ulema. The institution of Western legal codes removed clerics from the administration of justice, and in education, even the sons of distinguished religious figures were sent to Western-style schools, which were largely free of ulema. This marginalization was increased by the rise of printing, which weakened the traditional relationship between sheikh and talib, or student. When decolonization came after World War II, a time when nationalism was flourishing, Bulliet says, “The state school system . . . trained people for state service . . . but [state schools] were very cautious about teaching much of anything about Islam because they did not want to instill the reverence for the old authorities. They did not want to have the mullah in schools playing a major role in the education. So there was a growing number of literate young Muslims who could read books but who had not been trained in Islam and were not socialized to look at the sheikh as a figure of authority. The state took away the old authorities and gave an audience to the new ones, the lawyers, doctors, pharmacists, pedagogues, engineers, economists, who trained at Western schools or Western-curriculum schools, and these men say: Here is what I think.” The weakening of traditional authority was also, at least in part, an aspect of the twentieth-century Islamist program. Maududi wrote well before al-jihad appeared that “every Muslim who is capable and qualified to give a sound opinion on matters of Islamic law, is entitled to interpret the law of God when such interpretations become necessary.” With the bonds of tradition removed, all have the ability to argue for their version of the faith—in print, on audiotapes and videotapes, and now on the Internet. Says Bulliet, “At the

street level there is no agreement as to what constitutes authority in Islam.”

This concatenation of change bears a striking resemblance to another era of upheaval, when literacy was on the rise and established authority was under attack: the Protestant Reformation. From shortly after Martin Luther’s defiance of the Catholic Church through the English civil war, there were numerous occasions in which Protestant radicals of one sect or another, certain in their interpretation of the Bible, sought to create states in which God’s law ruled—a line runs from the rebellion of Thomas Muenzer in Germany in 1525 to Cromwell’s creation of the New Model Army for the “Revolution of the Saints.” (In the Pilgrims and the Puritans’ Great Migration of the late 1630s, there was a related, but peaceful, effort to depart from the larger, corrupt community and establish a republic of the holy.) A parallel can also be drawn between the Protestants’ reduction of the number of sacraments on the basis of what appeared in scripture and the Islamists’ effort to revise the pillars of the faith, raising jihad to the highest level of priority.

Despite al-Jihad’s technical competence as a clandestine group, it stumbled into a premature confrontation with the government. The trigger was the organization’s decision to undertake operations in upper Egypt against the Copts, the country’s ancient Christian population. The involvement began with the initiative of a separate Islamic group to build a mosque on land owned by a Christian. Despite a court order supporting the Copt’s claim that this violated his rights, the Muslim group continued its work. At wits’ end, the landowner took the law into his own hands and shot some of the militants at the construction site. This had a volcanic effect in Egypt, where tensions between the minority Christians and the Muslim population had been steadily rising. Al-Jihad decided to take advantage of the violent mood to build up contacts, especially in the military, and develop new sources for weapons and recruits.

The group then went on a spree of armed robberies to fatten its

treasury. They targeted Christian-owned jewelry stores, citing the Quran on the right to take spoils won in a war with polytheists. The cash went straight to Faraj. Flush with money and sensing that Egypt was ripe for a new Islamic order, the group began to plan for an assault on key government officials. They cased Sadat's Cairo residence and his villa, a residence of the Coptic leader, Pope Shenouda, the homes of the National Guard and Security Police commanders, and the Ministry of the Interior.

The spiraling violence precipitated government intervention. Sadat directed the security services to start a roundup of Islamic militants, whose opposition to the regime had become clear to the authorities. The police cast a wide net, arresting more than fifteen hundred activists. Virtually all of Faraj's southern Egyptian cells were broken up and leading operatives were apprehended. The group's prospects looked bleak; it would only be a matter of time before the al-Jihad leaders in custody would break under torture.

The conspirators, however, remained a step ahead. On September 23, 1981, Khalid al-Islambouli learned that he had been assigned to participate in the October 6 military parade in commemoration of the 1973 "victory" against Israel. (Egypt's ability to maintain a foothold in the Sinai peninsula had been construed as a triumph even though the war ended with the country's Third Army fully encircled west of the Suez Canal.) Within forty-eight hours, al-Islambouli met with Faraj to propose using the opportunity to kill Sadat and everyone else in the reviewing stand. Faraj recognized that this was al-Jihad's moment. Two members were immediately assigned to the assassination team, and another was brought into the group a few days later. Four colleagues from the south hurried to meet with Faraj, and together they devised a complementary plan for the takeover of the provincial capital of Asyut. Faraj set to work on a design for seizing control of Cairo itself, beginning with the television station. This facility was a priority objective because from it al-Jihad would announce to the world that the evil prince had been slain and that Muslims must now rise up and overthrow their jahili oppressors.

On October 6, the conspiracy began as planned. Al-Islambouli had

arranged for his real army squad to be given leave on the day of the parade and replaced by the three-man assassination team. As the truck neared the front of the reviewing stand, he pulled the emergency brake, dismounted with his companions, and sprinted toward the presidential section. There, pressed up against a barrier, they sprayed the assembled notables with automatic-rifle fire. The grainy image of a soldier pumping bullets into Sadat's body as the President groaned "*La, la*" ("No, no") was broadcast worldwide. The exultant killer jumped up and down, shouting, "My name is Khalid Islambouli, I have slain Pharaoh, and I do not fear death!"

The attempt to take over Cairo following the parade-ground killings failed completely, in part because the assassins were captured alive. The conspirators had expected to be shot on the scene; whether they were tortured or just delirious at their success, they revealed enough information to give the security services what they needed to overcome the other plotters—and the militants helped by falling short in their execution of the remainder of the plan. They had intended to steal weapons from an armory, but they botched the attempt to drug the security personnel there. As a result, they never had the firepower required to seize the television station. They also failed to get control of three of the city's vital traffic nodes and pedestrian plazas. In the south, the radicals began their operation late because of poor coordination but still succeeded in briefly taking over the central police headquarters in Asyut and nearly seized a second precinct. Most of the Tanzim were soon tracked down and killed or captured. A small remnant tried to continue the fight from remote hideouts. But the rapid, uncontested transfer of power to Sadat's vice president, Hosni Mubarak, meant that there was no upheaval of any kind, and the state suppressed these scattered efforts with brutal efficiency.

Of the many who faced trial in connection with the events of October 1981, it was the Blind Sheikh whose case proved most significant. He stood accused of having been the group's mufti—essentially, their chaplain. This meant more than offering spiritual succor to his flock: Rahman provided the fatwas that certified the legality of killing the Christian

jewelry-store owners and, because he was an apostate, of Anwar Sadat. He was also charged with helping to fence the stolen valuables and producing seditious propaganda tapes for distribution within Egypt.

Much of the testimony in the trials of the jihadists was extracted by torture, Rahman's included. However, the government apparently did not hinder the sheikh's defense counsel, and Rahman made no attempt to conceal his beliefs from the court. Instead, he delivered a virtuoso tirade against the judges, the state, and the law. He scorned the government that presumed to teach that "jihad is that [struggle] against illness, poverty, and ignorance," and he declared that "the word *jihad* in the language of [religious] law and in Islamic conception means fighting for the sake of Allah, to raise the word of Allah. And it is a notion that the umma has agreed upon for fourteen centuries." He insisted on the immutability of sharia, rejecting the supposition that "the different circumstances which the society is going through, according to the claims of the prosecution, allow it to suspend the legal punishments of Allah and his law. It [the prosecution] replaces divine laws with Crusader laws; it does not cut off the hand of the thief, it does not lash the drinker, it does not stone the married adulterer."

Astonishingly, most of the charges against Rahman were ultimately dismissed. He was found to have preached that apostate rulers must be overthrown but not to have specified that Sadat or any other leader should be executed. Likewise, Rahman was judged to have justified theft from Christians during jihad, but it was not proven that he authorized the specific attacks on Copts that were carried out by his congregants. The judges found that Rahman had simply acted within his writ as an *alim*, a member of the clerical establishment, in saying and doing these things. The exoneration seems bizarre, especially in light of his continued involvement with terrorists over the subsequent decade. After the Sadat assassination and while still in Egypt, he was implicated in the murders of the speaker of the parliament, Rifaat al-Mahgoub, and the secular writer Farag Foda. He is thought to have been involved in plots to kill the Nobel Prize-winning author Naguib Mahfouz and Sadat's successor, Hosni

Mubarak. And, of course, he played a central role in planning attacks against the United States in 1993, helping to select targets and authorizing bombings. As strange as his 1982 acquittal in Egypt may seem in retrospect, it was a powerful demonstration of the ideological affinities between the ulema and the terrorists. Clerical authorities could not contradict the underlying premise of the terrorists and their spiritual mentors, including Rahman, that rulers who deliberately forsake the sharia and reject their obligation to make it the law of the land deserve to die. As the Quran declares, "They who do not judge by that which God has revealed are the unbelievers."

To be sure, the vast majority of ulema would not agree to an explicit call for the death of a coreligionist. But this truth obscures a larger one. Muslims the world over look to the clerical establishment in Egypt for guidance in religious matters, and these authorities share some fundamental presuppositions, if not the conclusions, of the radical agenda. The strong insistence of many clergy on implementation of sharia in general and a ban on interest in particular; on censoring of sexual imagery and language in the media; on modesty in women's dress; and on the elimination of nightclubs and gambling have created a milieu that validates what the terrorists themselves are saying. When Rahman declares that "the lands of Muslims will not become bordellos for sinners of every race and color," who among his peers is going to argue with him? And if they did not subscribe to his conclusion that "America is behind all these un-Islamic governments"—those that reject sharia and foster such barbarities—and that a "revengeful God would scratch America from the face of the earth," what would happen to their credibility? The lesson of Rahman's 1982 acquittal in a Cairo courtroom is that there is a strong connection between the subculture of terrorism and a broader culture in which the basis for terrorist violence is well established and legally unassailable.

One characteristic of Egyptian religious terrorism has been the belief that a decisive blow against the government would somehow precipitate

an uprising against the government. Shuqri Mustafa expected that his group's actions would lead ineluctably to revolution. Al-Jihad thought that the masses could be roused to action once the Cairo television station was seized. Their belief was that the faithful were eager to throw off the yoke of jahiliyya, and that a single dramatic act would cause an extraordinary change in history. This conviction reappears among other groups of Islamists who seek radical change. In Syria, the year after Sadat's assassination, the idea surfaced again. The Muslim Brothers in that country—the group had long since spread from Egypt throughout the Arab world—had been growing restive during the 1970s like their Egyptian counterparts.

The Brothers' strongholds were in the Sunni-dominated northern cities of Aleppo, Homs, and Hama. In 1979, the group went on a killing spree at a military academy in Aleppo, murdering sixty-nine cadets. The cadets were Alawites, members of a minority sect related to the Shiites that had dominated Syria for over thirty years and is considered by radical Sunnis, like the Brothers, to be heretical.¹⁹ (Hafiz al-Assad, the long-time dictator, was an Alawite, as are his son Bashar and most of the country's military leadership.) The massacre was followed by a series of assassinations of Syrian officials, bombings of regional Baath party headquarters, and, finally, shoot-outs with security forces in downtown Damascus. When Egypt moved to put down its religious opposition, it was mindful of its own place at the center of the Arab world and showed relative restraint. Syria, a hermit regime on the periphery, decided that it did not need to follow suit. Al-Assad sent his brother Rifaat and a sizable military force northward in February 1982. There were no trials. Rifaat's forces ringed the ancient city of Hama with artillery and shelled it for three weeks. Afterward, military and internal security personnel were dispatched to comb through the rubble for surviving Brothers and their sympathizers. The best estimates are that eighteen thousand people were killed in Hama. Rifaat then proceeded to Aleppo and Homs, where it is said that casualties were even greater.

Since Syrian authorities did not rely on the due process of law and

there is no independent press in the country, we cannot know precisely what motivated the rebels. We can assume, however, that they were linked with the Egyptian movement, and shared its inspiration, doctrine, and objectives. The Syrian Brothers were likely seeking to spark the same divinely assisted revolution as were the radical offshoots of the Egyptian Brothers. Their fantasy of triggering a break in history through their actions is not far afield from Timothy McVeigh's notion that his blow against a symbol of the U.S. government's authority would spur a broad-based popular revolt in America against the nation's Jewish—read “infidel”—rulers. These terrorists see themselves in a metaphysical battle, in which an attack by the true believers against God's enemies will draw Him directly into the battle.

On November 20, 1979, at 5:30 in the morning, the imam of the Grand Mosque in Mecca was about to usher in the new year with special prayers when he was interrupted. A young Saudi man, dressed like a desert prophet and named Juhayman bin Muhammad bin Sayf al-Utaybi, stood up before fifty thousand stunned worshipers and declared his brother-in-law Muhammad bin Abd Allah al-Qahtani to be the Mahdi, Islam's long-awaited messiah. “The Mahdi and his men,” shouted al-Utaybi into the microphone, “will seek shelter and protection in the Holy Mosque because they are persecuted everywhere until they have no recourse but the Holy Mosque.”

Shots were fired, but the imam managed to escape and notify the authorities. For the next three hours, officials were at a loss about how to respond, and in that time, Juhayman actually convinced many in the throng that the Mahdi had truly arrived. When it dawned on local officials that the radicals were linked to the security forces, they realized they faced a crisis. Al-Utaybi was a veteran of the Saudi Arabian National Guard (SANG), a military unit formed from the fierce Bedouin tribes of the Wahhabi heartland. These troops were the best equipped in the kingdom because it was their job to put down insurrections in the ranks of the

regular army units or in the streets. Traditionally, the commander of this praetorian guard is the kingdom's crown prince. (Abdullah, the current crown prince and de facto Saudi leader since King Fahd's incapacitation, led the SANG for many years.) But whoever was supposed to be watching the watchers had failed. National Guard troops had infiltrated weapons, ammunition, gas masks, and provisions into the mosque compound over a period of weeks before the new year. When al-Utaybi and his followers made their move, the National Guard units that were present reportedly refused to fire on them.²⁰

Al-Utaybi began his takeover at the dawn hour of New Year's Day, the first day of the month of Muharram, fourteen hundred years after Muhammad's Hijra from Mecca to Medina. The year 1000 had been a time of mass hysteria for Christians across Europe, and the approach of the year 1000 in the Islamic calendar, as an Ottoman official recorded, brought a period of unnerving anticipation and "signs," including a revolt, fires, and an outbreak of plague. The first day of the year 1400 after the Hijra was also laden with millennial significance. According to one well-known tradition, the Mahdi would reveal himself on this day. The portents of his coming were compelling: Muhammad bin Abd Allah al-Qahtani was a descendant of Muhammad's tribe, a descendant of the Prophet himself. "His and his father's names were the same as Muhammad's and his father's, and he had come to Mecca from the north," as a hadith had predicted.

Al-Utaybi was inspired by both ibn Taymiyya and the revered ibn Abd al-Wahhab, and he made this debt explicit in demands that were belted over the mosque's public-address system throughout the crisis and in a 190-page compendium of letters that circulated secretly throughout the kingdom.²¹ Islam, the rebels declared, was in a disastrous state. The Saudi government was guilty of failing to rule under sharia. It governed arbitrarily and introduced innovations that undermined the faith, much like its counterparts in the capitals of other Islamic countries. "All Muslims are living under imposed rulers who do not uphold the religion," the document asserted. "We owe obedience only to those who lead by God's

book. Those who lead the Muslims with differing laws and systems and who only take from religion what suits them have no claim on our obedience and their mandate to rule is nil.”²² The Saudi rulers were apostates, like the Dajjal, the deceiver or false messiah who lures Muslims from the path of God. “Anyone with eyesight can see today how they represent religion as a form of humiliation, insult, and mockery. These rulers have subjected Muslims to their interests and made religion into a way of acquiring their materialistic interests. They have brought upon Muslims all evil and corruption.” Also damningly, the al-Saud had entered into an alliance with Christians, allowing foreign military and civilian personnel to tread on the sacred soil of Arabia. These Christians were plundering Islam’s legacy and impoverishing Muslims while enriching themselves and their apostate accomplices within the House of al-Saud. According to some traditions, the redeemer—by implication, al-Qahtani—would slay the Dajjal and establish a just kingdom, where poverty had been abolished and the Sunna (“Path”) of Muhammad reinstated.

Outside the mosque, the Saudis were in disarray. With the trustworthiness of the country’s best officers and men impossible to gauge, regular army troops were thrown into the battle. But these forces had only rudimentary skills and lacked the weaponry, specialized combat training, and experience to root out hundreds of fanatical, heavily armed men from the dark cellars of the gigantic complex. The use of overwhelming firepower was out of the question; the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, as the Saudi monarch calls himself, was scarcely in a position to destroy Islam’s most sacred structure in order to save it. The militants’ resolve, preparation, and strong defensive position made an infantry assault suicidal.

The official ulema reacted with horror at the takeover, and some of them issued a fatwa authorizing the use of force against “the wild beast” al-Utaybi and the Mahdists. Yet they were in an embarrassing position. They themselves had decried the infiltration of foreign ideas and technologies, they resented the advent of secular domestic institutions such as the Justice Ministry, and they disapproved of Saudi alliances with other

countries. In expressing their opposition to the royal program of modernization, they, like their counterparts in Egypt, legitimated the radical agenda and inadvertently encouraged a mood of violent pessimism. The ulama, however, both depended on the regime for their status and influence and rejected rebellion as unjustifiable under Islam.

With time and royal credibility being lost, the Saudi leadership decided to call on the French for “technical” assistance. Paris obliged by deploying to Mecca the Groupe d’Intervention de la Gendarmerie Nationale, a national paramilitary law-enforcement agency. The results have not been officially documented, but informed observers report that the French advisers offered the Saudis two options: use nerve gas against the fighters, or flood the mosque substructures and insert a high-voltage cable to electrocute them en masse. There are conflicting accounts of which method the Saudis chose—secretive in the best of times, they have been extraordinarily unwilling to talk about any aspect of the takeover—but the government forces got the upper hand. Bitter hand-to-hand fighting continued in the mosque cellars until December 5, 1979, more than two weeks after the takeover began, when al-Utaybi and his surviving cohort were taken into custody and paraded before television cameras. He and al-Qahtani were subsequently decapitated, along with more than sixty of his surviving coconspirators, in the largest mass execution in Saudi history. And rumors circulated for some time after that al-Utaybi—the John the Baptist figure in this drama—or the savior al-Qahtani was alive and in hiding.

The claim that the messiah had come was not unprecedented. From the testimony of those who knew him, it is clear Shuqri Mustafa thought he was the Mahdi, and he intimated as much at his trial. In his writings, as in Faraj’s, the complete absence of any thought about the day after the jihadists strike their blow—after Pharaoh is slain—reinforces the sense that these men were possessed by an apocalyptic mind-set.

A verse especially favored by all of these conspirators, Sura 9:14 of the Quran, says, “Fight them and God will punish them at your hands. . . . God will make you victorious over them.” The militants take this to mean

that the warrior need only strike the first blow in the conflict, which is taking place both on earth and in heaven: God will finish the job. A gloss quoted by the terrorists on the verse says that "God has changed the law of nature to punish unbelievers [at Sodom and Gomorrah] and will do the same today."

The uprising in the Grand Mosque showed what a strong hold violent messianic ideas had on a few hundred Saudis. In the decades since, it has become evident that new apocalyptic myths are capturing the imagination of readers in much of the Middle East. These stories and novels mix themes from the Quran and the Bible with *Star Wars* imagery. The works appear in Middle Eastern bookshops, and although it is difficult to gauge how large a readership they have, shopkeepers say they sell well. The end-of-the-world motif meshes well with the deep pessimism and anger that permeate most of the Islamic world because of the perception of chronic economic failure and political weakness.

A young scholar of Islam at Rice University, David Cook is a pioneer in studying this new literature.* Among the writers he has considered is Muhammad Isa Saud, who, writing in the late 1990s, predicted that the messiah "will emerge at the festival of the hajj in 1419 [1998-99], and in Muharram 1420 [1999-2000] he will proclaim the return of the caliphate. If the issue is delayed, it will not be beyond 1425 [2004-2005] . . . and in 2000 there will be the battle of the Mediterranean and in 2001 will be Armageddon, which will be preceded by or be close to a great nuclear battle between France and America in which Paris will be destroyed, and the sea will swallow up New York." Another apocalyptic writer, Bashir Muhammad, writes that the United States is actually the mysterious tribe

* We are grateful to Professor Cook for his insights and for sharing with us the manuscript of his forthcoming book, *Between Hope and Hatred: Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature*, as well as his article "America: The Second 'Ad: Prophecies About the Downfall of the United States," from which we have drawn the quotations from contemporary Muslim apocalyptic literature.

of Ad. In the Quran, Ad is a city destroyed by God as punishment for its repudiation of his authority.²³ Bashir Muhammad interprets scriptural references to Ad to show that it was an extraordinarily advanced society, with sophisticated weaponry including nuclear arms, a panoply of cultural achievements, a permissive attitude toward homosexuality, and skyscrapers. The tribe's arrogance is unbounded; to the writer, the signs that it is the United States are unmistakable.

Yet another installment in this genre maintains that America is the Dajjal, the deceiver of early Islamic apocalyptic texts. He aims to rule the world, but as the end of time approaches, he will be thwarted. In the overheated prose typical of these stories:

All of this will not happen despite the Jews, the Dajjal, their helpers and their slaves from the infidel Masonic collaborationist governments, and their ignorant masses . . . the U.S. will be slaughtered—which will break the Dajjal's strong arm, and necessitate his disappearance for a time. . . . Then he will go to Europe and lead Russia in its war against the united Islamic state led by the true caliph, the Mahdi. But the true conflict is between the Jewish Zionists who ride a horse called the Crusaders—this conflict will be between the Islamic community and their enemies the Jews and the Christians, who are one.

From this will develop the great apocalyptic war, the War of Armageddon among the Jews and Christians. The Dajjal will appear [in person] after it, after the Muslim conquest of Rome and all of Europe and America as well, since it will be his [the Dajjal's] plan that both the Crusader and the Islamic armies perish during the course of this battle. Then he will appear with his secret army of hypocrites—those are most of his followers—the Masons and the other Jewish secret organizations, and a special army of the children of fornication which are numerous today in the immoral prostrate West.

The reader, of course, will not be disappointed. The climactic battle will ultimately be won by the Mahdi. Drawing on the Book of Revelation,

these apocalyptic fantasists identify America as “the first head of the beast that leads the other six heads” to be struck by God. Destruction comes in as many ways, depending on the writer. In one version, devastation will arrive in the form of an enormous earthquake predicted in the Quran for the end of days.²⁴ In this scenario, New York City is singled out for complete annihilation:

Since in New York especially there are more Jews than in other places, and in it is their wealth, their banks, their political foundations which control the entire world (the U.N., the Security Council, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the principal media networks), so there is no evil greater than in New York in any other place on the inhabited earth, and for this reason their portion of the punishment will be greater in measure and it will be a total uprooting.

After the destruction of New York, the conflict swings back and forth, until a last battle involving nuclear and chemical weapons annihilates America and the Jews. To cap this epic, the rest of the world freely converts to Islam and peace envelops all.

Several threads run through these visions of religious violence. The participants fight in another dimension, where absolute good and evil contend for primacy. Historical time is drawing to a close and a battle is about to be joined that will lead to the appearance of the messiah or God’s ultimate triumph. Time becomes compressed. The enemy of centuries ago is indistinguishable from the enemy of today, and all the characters take on the outsize proportions of the mythic.

Intellectual history is replete with cases of ideas long eclipsed reappearing and capturing the imagination. The appropriation and reinvention, after some fourteen hundred years, of classical republicanism by Machiavelli and his followers—which, through various leaps, wound up

influencing America's founding fathers—is one case. The resurrection in the twentieth century of ibn Taymiyya's thinking about governance and piety, apostasy and jihad is another. The process was carried out by a strange assortment of individuals. Among them were serious intellectuals, deeply affected by the currents of contemporary politics, men such as Rida, Qutb, and Maududi. Others, hard men like Siriyya, Faraj, and al-Islambouli, combined varying degrees of interest in theory with a readiness to commit violence. Others, including Shuqri Mustafa and Juhayman al-Utaybi, evinced a messianic zeal, a furious otherworldliness that is the most foreign of all these qualities to our twenty-first-century sensibilities. All of them, however, drank deeply from the headwaters of jihad in the Mamluk empire of the fourteenth century.

Their ideas, moreover, all feed into the eruption of jihadist Islamism that has confronted the West, and America in particular, over the last decade. In Usama bin Laden, all these streams converge—Qutb's uncompromising opposition to the world of jahiliyya, al-Utaybi's Wahhabi fervor and millennialism, and more than a generation of theorizing and vilification of secular rulers in the lands of Islam and the West. The perception of a world in crisis, of a battle waged simultaneously on earth and in heaven, and of the ability to hasten divine intervention through human acts—all these come together in al-Qaeda and the monumental violence of September 11, 2001.

CHAPTER 3

THE WARRIOR PRINCE

FOR THE MOST HUNTED MAN of his era, Usama bin Muhammad bin Awad bin Laden has a biography that is astonishingly vague. The facts of his early life, in particular, remain largely unknown. This obscurity is all the more surprising because bin Laden is a scion of one of the wealthiest, best-known families in Saudi Arabia.

The bin Ladens are Saudi citizens but are not Saudi in origin. They are a family of the Hadramawt, a region of southeastern Yemen that is one of the ancient places of the earth, mentioned in the tenth chapter of Genesis in the recitation of the descendants of Noah and the lands they peopled. In the 1930s, Usama's father, Muhammad bin Awad bin Laden, an illiterate peasant, left his impoverished village and traveled with his brother to Saudi Arabia, where he found work as a porter. He set up his own construction firm, which rapidly grew into a large concern. The elder bin Laden ingratiated himself with the royal family and secured a sizable part of the Saudi construction market. He was roadbuilder-in-chief for a nation that had virtually no paved highways, and, under King Faisal, he served as minister of public works. Within the kingdom, Saudi Binladin Group projects have included several royal palaces

and the renovations of the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina and the Grand Mosque in Mecca, the latter a vast, costly project that enlarged the structure, which holds some fifty thousand people. (The firm has also handled the renovations of the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem in the 1960s, and Usama has boasted of its responsibility for improvements on the three holiest sites of Islam.) In 2002, the company tore down the 230-year-old Ottoman fortress in Mecca as part of a \$500 million development project to build high-rises and a luxury hotel. Another large contract in the 1990s involved building a military base for U.S. service personnel, who were relocated deep in the Saudi desert after the 1995 bombing of Khobar Towers. Today, the annual revenues of the family-held company are estimated to be in the vicinity of \$5 billion, it employs more than 35,000 people, and its operations have broadened to include everything from selling soft drinks to building the Kuala Lumpur airport. The company has counted among its business partners companies ranging from General Electric to Citigroup to the Carlyle Group, an investment firm whose principals include former secretary of defense Frank Carlucci, former secretary of state James Baker, and former British prime minister John Major, and whose advisers include a former U.S. President, George H. W. Bush.

Born in 1957 in Riyadh, Usama was the seventeenth son and one of the youngest of Muhammad bin Laden's fifty-four children. He was the only son of his father's fourth wife, a Syrian from whom the elder bin Laden was later divorced. (Muhammad eventually had eleven wives, though, in accordance with Islamic law, never more than four at a time.) As their fortunes multiplied, the bin Ladens became one of the kingdom's grand cosmopolitan families. Members settled in Britain and Switzerland and elsewhere to tend to business; many regularly vacationed abroad. In 1967, Muhammad bin Laden was killed in a plane crash. Leadership of the family business passed to Salem, the eldest son and one of several bin Ladens who married Western women, in this case a member of the English upper classes. In 1988, in the second of two aviation disasters to mark Usama's life before September 11, Salem, too, was

CHAPTER 12

A WORLD OF TERROR

THE AGE OF SACRED TERROR is not just the age of Islamic terror. In a world turning more religious, more adherents of the great faiths and new, burgeoning cults are placing violence at the heart of their beliefs. The last two centuries in the history of the Muslim world and the sad economic and political state of its many countries have given militants like bin Laden a platform to spread their creed, thus putting radical Islamists at the forefront of those who kill in the name of God. But they are hardly alone, and with increasingly easy access to technologies of mass killing, small groups of believers can inflict unimaginable damage. Jews, Christians, and members of one of the new religions of Japan have used terror strategically in the last decade, some of them killing on a scale without precedent in the recent history of their faiths.

Over the last three hundred and fifty years, the West has worked hard to keep religion out of the dealings between states. The banishment of religion from the repertoire of acceptable reasons to wage war has its origins in the famous Treaty of Westphalia of 1648. In recent years, the treaty has

been much discussed as the foundation of the modern system of nation-states, entities whose sovereignty within their borders is inviolable. The treaty did not, as is often said, create freedom of religion—though it did establish a new level of tolerance and security for Catholics and Protestants living in lands ruled by princes of the other confession—nor did it provide for any kind of separation of religion and state. Instead, it reaffirmed and clarified the right of the prince to determine the religion of his country. In other words, it made it illegitimate for one country to make war against another for reasons of religion—so that one “true” faith could be imposed on another.

The princes and diplomats who met in the German cities of Münster and Osnabrück established this new order because of the desperate experience of the Thirty Years War. The conflict, which drew in forces from most of Europe, left more destruction behind it than any event since the Black Death. Many reasons lay behind the conflict, but the ferocity of the killing and the devastation that consumed Europe from Alsace to Bohemia was fueled by religious hatred between Protestant and Catholic. Those who wrecked Germany were usually spurred on by cynical leaders, but in their hearts, most of the combatants believed they were carrying out acts of piety. When the war ended, many cities had less than half the people they began with; some towns had only a fifth. Insofar as the conflict left a mark on the West, it was a deep, subliminal sense of the peculiarly horrible nature of religious war.¹

Religious violence is typically different from any other kind of warfare—for the simple reason that for a true believer, there is no compromise about the sacred. Or, to put it in a more monotheistic key: one God, one truth. Tolerance is not an intrinsic part of any of the monotheistic religions. For some believers, the outcome of a conflict cannot be ambiguous.

When the issues are sacred demands, there can be no bargaining. The believer cannot compromise on the will of God. Killing becomes an end in itself, rather than one instrument arrayed among nonlethal instruments in a bargaining process. Such believers want a lot of people dead and may

not care whether a lot of people are watching, as long as God sees what has been done in His name.

Why, looking back over earlier periods, does it seem as though monotheism and violence go hand in hand? Part of the answer lies in the enduring influence of the Hebrew Bible on Christianity and Islam. The great preoccupation of the biblical writers was to take a newly formed people and give them a distinctive identity. The books of the Bible were meant to tell the Israelites who they were and how they came to be. Like societies elsewhere, this community carved out its identity by differentiating itself from the surrounding peoples. One central biblical message to the children of Israel was "You are who you are because you are not the other."

The lesson is reinforced in innumerable ways: the Israelites have a unique covenant with the one God and a territory belonging to them alone; their cultic practices and social customs are different from their neighbors'; they possess true nationhood, unlike others who worship false gods that cannot confer this special status.² Nations such as the Amalek, whose claims conflict with those of God's people, are placed under a total ban that requires their complete destruction. "And the Lord said to Moses, 'Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.' . . . The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."³

The Bible's division between those who belong and those who do not makes it natural to see life as war. From the viewpoint of the biblical authors, God's role as a warrior is matched only by that of lawgiver and ultimate savior. For the author of Exodus, "The Lord is a man of war, the Lord is his name."⁴ The Deuteronomist holds up God as the One "who rides through the heavens to your help, and in his majesty through the skies. . . . Happy are you O Israel! Who is like you a people saved by the Lord, the shield of your help and the sword of your triumph. Your enemies will come fawning to you; and you shall tread on their high places."⁵

Imagery of battle in the Hebrew Bible is bloody and vivid. The Song

Benjamin, Dan. Age of Sacred Terror : Radical Islam's War Against America. Westminster, MD, USA: Random House Adult Trade Publishing Group, 2003. p 445. <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/princeton/Doc?id=10046222&ppg=445>

of Deborah celebrates the Israelite victory over the Canaanites, a victory sealed by the death of the exhausted Canaanite commander whose head is nailed to the ground with a tent peg by a Bedouin woman with whom he seeks shelter. In Genesis, the destruction of the city of Shechem by Jacob's sons in retaliation for the rape of their sister Dinah is equally explicit. The brothers lure the men of Shechem into a bloody trap by offering both their defiled sister in marriage and a political alliance predicated upon the circumcision of the Shechemite males. A deal is sealed, and the men are circumcised, and on the third day, "when they were sore," Dinah's brothers Simeon and Levi "took their swords and came upon the city unawares, and killed all the males. They slew Hamor and his Shechem by the sword. . . . And the sons of Jacob came upon the slain and plundered the city because their sister had been defiled; they took their flocks and their herds, their asses and whatever was in the city and the field; all their wealth, all their little ones, all that was in their houses, they captured and made their prey."

Violent imagery is also part of the earliest Islamic writings. The Quran's matter-of-fact discussion of fighting reflects the desert environment in which Muhammad prophesied. Raiding was common, people were killed, blood feuds were pursued. The early Muslim community struck its enemies and suffered attacks in turn. At the battle of Badr Wells in 624 C.E. God's angels intervene on behalf of the Muslim combatants.⁶ A year later, the battle of Uhud led to a defeat for the Muslims. Much of the detail of these battles can be found in *The Life of Muhammad* compiled by Muhammad ibn Ishaq, who was born in Medina within about fifty years of the Prophet's death.⁷ Ibn Ishaq recounts the actions of a widow after a Muslim attack on her tribe:

Hind, the daughter of Utba and the women with her, stopped to mutilate the Apostle's [Muhammad's] dead companions. They cut off their ears and noses and Hind made them into anklets and collars. . . . She cut out Hamza's liver and chewed it, but she was not able to swallow it and threw it away. Then she mounted a high rock

and shrieked at the top of her voice: "We have paid you back for Badr, and a war that follows a war is always violent. . . . I have slaked my vengeance and fulfilled my vow. . . ."

Again, according to ibn Ishaq, when Muhammad turned against the Jewish tribe of Banu Qurayza, he "went out to the market of Medina . . . and dug trenches in it. Then he sent for [the Jews] and struck off their heads in those trenches as they were brought out to him in batches . . . there were 600 or 700 in all, though some put the figure as 800 or 900." Like the Hebrew Bible before it, early Islamic literature is not squeamish.

NEVER-ENDING WAR

The scriptural emphasis on warfare has armed successive generations with powerful mental images of an embattled world. The community of the faithful is perpetually in crisis or at its edge. When a religious group believes that its identity is fundamentally threatened, it may turn to stories of apocalypse that describe the end of earthly history. In Christian apocalypses, Jesus is not the pacifist messiah of the Gospels, but a man of war. The role of angels and demons that intervene in the physical world, uniting the heavenly and earthly battlefields, is especially important in these stories, because it shows that evil is destroyed not just in some metaphorical or symbolic way in the cosmic sphere, but in a parallel, objective sense on earth.

In Christian and Jewish apocalyptic literature—exactly as in the Muslim literature, which is based largely on the earlier-born faiths—the reversal of fortune is a stock theme. The righteous advance from suffering under the murderous rule of a terrible beast to a restored community of believers who enjoy eternal life in the presence of God. The transforming event is the destruction of the beast, followed by the annihilation of Satan and death at the hands of a heavenly figure sent by God. The beast doesn't have to be a bloody persecutor to qualify as the apocalyptic

enemy. For the Christian author of Revelation, the very existence of Rome, the beast in that book, was enough to excite visions of fantastic violence.

This is a violence-prone cast of mind, especially when imbued with the belief that the last days are near and a messiah has arisen to usher in the day of judgment. When this way of thinking emerged among Jews in the Roman Empire, it paved the way for two centuries of doomed messianic movements and bloody Jewish revolts that resulted in the annihilation of Palestinian Jewry and the massacre of Jewish communities from Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean.

In times of severe social dislocation, political change, and economic upheaval, individuals overwhelmed by radical pessimism may turn to apocalyptic millenarianism. They see the signs that their tradition has identified as portents of the end of time. The tribulation they experience is interpreted as the era of cataclysms that precedes the eruption of a new order and God's reassertion of His beneficent rule. When these individuals merge into groups and find a charismatic leader, or he finds them, they can be stirred to dramatic action intended to force the end of time and the kingdom of God.

While Islamists look to the days of the rightly guided caliphs as a golden age, Jewish radicals hark back to the establishment of the Davidic kingdom in the tenth century B.C.E. or the Hasmonean victory in the second century B.C.E. over a pagan oppressor. The mythologizing of history is a two-way street. Miraculous events of the past are projected onto the future, especially in times of distress. Moreover, current catastrophe is taken as a sign that the emblematic victories of the past are on the verge of being repeated. The misery and humiliation of the present presage the glory and justice of the imminent future. In all the faiths, current and past woes are attributed to the faithlessness and fecklessness of the community of believers.

The last two decades saw episodes of apocalyptic violence or attempts to spark the apocalypse, which were not confined to literature, or to Islam.

Judaism, Christianity, and even an offshoot of Buddhism have each tried to force the end of history: the Israeli religious militancy of the 1980s and 1990s, which nurtured the assassin of Yitzhak Rabin; the Japanese cult Aum Shinrikyo; and the Christian Identity movement, which nourished Timothy McVeigh. Their stories highlight the believers' conviction that their world is in crisis and about to be engulfed, a certainty that a new age is upon them that will bring catastrophe and redemption, and that believers themselves have a role in setting this cosmic process into motion.

JEWISH MESSIANISM

Israel's unexpected and shattering victory in the June 1967 war brought the holiest places in Judaism under the authority of a Jewish state for the first time in almost two thousand years. Not only was the military outcome apparently miraculous, but sudden access to the Temple Mount, the Tomb of the Patriarchs, the city of Hebron, and other sites was packed with religious significance. The emotional and psychological effect of these events was enormous: one consequence was the emergence of a new kind of Zionism.

Classical Zionism was primarily a secular nationalist movement, which aimed to normalize the status of the Jewish people through statehood. Religious faith was subordinated to ethnic identity. After 1967, a more religiously oriented Zionism, which cast the national enterprise as the fulfillment of a biblical promise, began to compete with more secular ideas about the purpose and meaning of the Israeli state. The seeds of this new movement had been planted long before, by a Rabbi Kook, whose seminary in Jerusalem trained the elite of the highly Orthodox Jews in Israel. He preached that the establishment of Israel was due to God's action in history and that the creation of the state was a crucial episode in the unfolding of a divine plan leading to the advent of the messiah. The nature of the 1967 war seemed to many to confirm this worldview.

But the exaltation of 1967 gave way to the grief of October 1973, when Israeli intelligence failed to detect Egyptian and Syrian prepara-

tions for a massive two-front assault. The Syrians and Egyptians were driven back in desperate fighting, but Israel was deeply traumatized.

Out of the shock and demoralization of this war, a new political movement arose in 1974: Gush Emunim, "The Bloc of the Faithful." Members focused on gaining political influence and expanding settlements, especially in places associated with biblical heroes and events. This would establish a mutually reinforcing dynamic, through which larger numbers of settlers would have increasing political power, which would in turn win more government support for additional settlements, which would add to the movement's political clout. The strategy seemed sound. When the right-wing Likud party was voted into power in 1977 under Menachem Begin, Gush Emunim activists concluded that ultimate victory was theirs and that Israel would indeed reach the borders promised by the Bible. They were soon disillusioned. Begin almost immediately entered into negotiations with Egypt for the return of the Sinai peninsula and agreed to negotiate autonomy for the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. The resulting Camp David Accord, from the perspective of a number of Gush Emunim activists, was a monumental disaster. How could this happen? How could Israel come so close to the fulfillment of the biblical promise and then be betrayed by the very leader who had seemed destined to take the necessary last steps?

Two Jews in particular were asking themselves these questions in 1978: Yeshua Ben-Shoshan and Yehuda Etzion. Ben-Shoshan was an avid student of the Kabbalah, a group of medieval mystical texts which assert that exile prevents the re-creation of a lost cosmic order and the possibility of redemption. Exile continues and intensifies the cosmic disorder that began with Adam's first sin. The Tetragrammaton, the four-letter name of God, which contains all the emanated worlds, cannot come together into the single, unitary name for God until Jews are restored to their land. The implication for Ben-Shoshan and Etzion was clear: continued Jewish possession of the entire land of Israel is the indispensable ingredient of cosmic order.

In classic apocalyptic mode, these messianists concluded that the

tragedy of the Camp David peace agreement between Israel and Egypt was the fault of the Jewish people. Their transgression was to permit the presence of the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount. This was an abomination, for which God was punishing Israel by withholding redemption. Not only did the mosque have to be removed, but Israel would have to revert to the kingdom it once was, with its borders between the two rivers of the Nile and Euphrates. According to Etzion, "This kingdom will be directed by the supreme court [the ancient Sanhedrin of seventy sages] which is bound to sit on the place chosen by God to emit his inspiration, a site which will have a temple, an altar, and a king chosen by God. All the people of Israel will inherit the land to labor and to keep."⁸ The redemptive power and purpose of removing the great mosque was later described by Etzion as follows: "The expurgation of the Temple Mount will prepare the hearts for the understanding and further advancing of our full redemption. The purified mount shall be—if God wishes—the ground and the anvil for the future process of promoting the next holy elevation."⁹

Etzion, Ben-Shoshan, Menachem Livni (the underground commander), Gilead Peli, and several others began preparations to destroy the Dome of the Rock. During the next three years they stockpiled explosives stolen from the Israeli army, manufactured twenty-eight sophisticated explosive packages, surveilled security arrangements, mapped out the structurally vulnerable points, and determined how to collapse the Dome without damaging the surface of the Temple Mount. The operation was to be carried out by as many as twenty attackers, armed with Uzi sub-machine guns. Logistical preparations were conducted in tandem with a continuous seminar in the theological and political implications of the act they were intent upon carrying out.

The question of what the conspirators actually thought would happen when the Dome of the Rock was demolished and Israel laid claim to most of the Near East has not been answered in mundane terms. Some appeared to have believed that the destruction of the shrine would force Israel's Arab neighbors to invade, compelling Israel to launch its nuclear

weapons in self-defense. The resulting cataclysm would usher in the millennium, as predicted in many apocalyptic narratives. Etzion himself seemed to believe that the very act of bringing down the Dome of the Rock would fundamentally alter the course of history. He said, "For the Gentiles, life is mainly a life of existence, while ours is a life of destiny, the life of a kingdom of priests and a holy people. We exist in the world in order to actualize destiny."¹⁰ With the purification of the Temple Mount, the laws of destiny would take effect and the world would be utterly transformed.

The operation was never carried out, for an important reason. Most religious terrorists want authoritative religious sanctions for their acts. They know that what they are doing is wrong from the standpoint of normal, secular rules and perhaps even repugnant to their own moral sensibility. God's dispensation is essential. As we have seen, the 1993 World Trade Center plotters appear to have sought a fatwa from the Blind Sheikh to authorize their attack. In this case, Menachem Livni approached several prominent rabbis associated with Gush Emunim. Livni disclosed enough about the conspiracy to regard the answer as definitive. The answer was no. Without rabbinical backing, the plotters abandoned the plan. It is hard to imagine what the impact on the Middle East would have been of a different response.

Dr. Baruch Goldstein, another cosmic warrior, shot twenty-nine Muslim worshipers to death and wounded 150 at the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron. Goldstein was a follower of Rabbi Meir Kahane, the proponent of the expulsion of Arabs from Israel and, ultimately, the victim of El-Sayyid Nosair. Kahane saw Jews and Gentiles locked in an existential struggle that had been going on for thousands of years. He justified ruthless action to exact vengeance for the violence done to Jews during the millennia when they were in exile and incapable of self-defense. He also looked back for inspiration and a model to the Hasmonaean kingdom established by the Maccabees, a priestly family that led a successful revolt against Syrians who occupied Judea in the second century B.C.E.

Goldstein was intoxicated by these ideas. For him, the conflict be-

tween Jews and Muslims had reached a crisis point. The problem wasn't just the rock-throwing and the tit-for-tat killings. It was bigger than that. The Jews faced a catastrophe. The time for divine intervention had arrived. It was the holiday of Purim, when the Scroll of Esther is chanted before the congregation. Goldstein saw himself and his fellow Jews in the same crisis that had enveloped the Jews of Persia, who in the story faced annihilation. Historical time was drastically compressed, and the ancient narrative of Esther had become his own. He was present at the crescendo of an all-encompassing war that had begun thousands of years before. No rabbinical dispensation was necessary. It was time to strike, and just as in the climax of the Scroll of Esther, "The Jews smote all their enemies with the sword, slaughtering and destroying them, and did as they pleased to those who hated them."¹¹

A favorable rabbinical ruling *was* issued regarding another religiously motivated terrorist attack: the 1995 assassination of Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, an event that has had a profound impact on Middle Eastern politics and American interests.

Among the settlers, especially the Gush Emunim movement, hatred of Rabin was intense in the mid-1990s. The prime minister had made no attempt to hide his contempt for the settlers, whom he judged to be a liability for Israeli security and a danger to its larger strategic interests. The religious settlers feared that Rabin would use the army to enforce the evacuation of settlements that were increasingly indefensible, including clusters of settlers and squatters in and around Hebron, which attracted pious settlers because it is the reputed burial place of the biblical patriarchs. In 1993, Rabbi Shlomo Goren, who had served as head chaplain for the Israel Defense Forces and enjoyed considerable authority, wrote that Jews should be prepared to "give our lives in the struggle against the vicious plan of the government of Israel [to evacuate the settlements] and be ready to die rather than allow the destruction of Hebron." A subsequent statement signed by Goren and three other leading lights of the Orthodox rabbinical establish-

ment went further, instructing Jews to “disobey any order to evacuate Jewish settlers from Jewish land.” Since the army would be given the task of clearing the settlements, this was an authoritative religious invitation to violence, and a challenge to the legitimacy of the Rabin government. In the meantime, the demonization of Rabin by his radical enemies was under way with wall posters in Israeli cities depicting him as a Nazi.

At the country’s Orthodox university, Bar Ilan, student organizations vied with one another in justifying the obligation of Israeli Jews to oppose the policies of the Rabin government by force. A political science professor, Uri Milstein, attained great popularity with his lectures denigrating Rabin’s military record. One spellbound student was an intense, Orthodox young man of Yemeni descent named Yigal Amir. The academic affirmation of his views about Rabin reinforced his growing conviction that the prime minister represented an historic danger to the Jewish people. Amir, whose religious training had been thorough, accepted the Orthodox legal assessment of Rabin’s policies that was then circulating both in Israel and among some hard-line Orthodox Zionists in the United States. Rabin, in this assessment, was guilty of transgressing Jewish law by jeopardizing Jewish lives and transferring Israel’s patrimony to non-Jews. He was therefore liable to two judgments: the *din rodef*, “law of the pursuer,” and the *din moser*, “law of the one who hands over.” The original application of the *din rodef* was straightforward: if a murderer is pursuing a victim, it is permissible to slay the pursuer. The *din moser* was more commonly invoked in Jewish diaspora history with respect to informers (*mosrim*), who would provide information to Gentile authorities for their own aggrandizement or to compromise a hated individual or family. Often, such informers would spark pogroms or massacres that would claim many victims. There is evidence that *mosrim* were executed at various times and places in Jewish communities in Europe until a few hundred years ago. (The killing of informers is one of the few crimes for which rabbinical authorities have waived the general prohibition of capital punishment since the disappearance of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish supreme court, in 70 C.E. One explanation for this is the clear and present

danger that an informer posed to the life and welfare of vulnerable Jewish communities in a hostile Europe.)

In Rabin's case, land, rather than information, was being handed over to hostile powers, with lethal implications for Israeli Jews. More broadly, the surrender of Jewish land endangered the redemption of the Jewish people as a whole. The crime therefore had a metaphysical dimension that made it all the more frightening to people like Yigal Amir. Leaders of the settler community declared, "Should they [government officials] be tried according to the *Halakha* [Jewish law]? And if proven guilty as accomplices to murder, what should their sentence be? Is it not the obligation of the communities' leaders to warn the head of government and his ministers that if they keep pursuing the agreement after the terrible experience of stage one [Oslo I], in all of Judea and Samaria, they will be subject . . . to the Halakhic [legal] ruling of *din moser*, as ones who surrender the life and property of Jews to the gentiles?"¹²

On the night of October 6, 1995, Avigdor Eskin, a member of Gush Emunim, and some of his companions gathered near Rabin's official residence in Jerusalem to perform the occult rite of *Pulsa d'Nura*, "Blazing Disks." In the early Middle Ages, it was believed that God used a kind of cat-o'-nine-tails tipped with fiery metal disks to slay wicked Jews. The liturgy of the *Pulsa d'Nura* is little known among Jews, most of whom have never heard the obscure Aramaic phrase, or have much use for the service, which aims to bring God's lethal wrath down on transgressors within the Jewish community. The rite is said to require ten adult male participants, who gather before midnight in a synagogue or cave lit with black candles. There they chant the names of angels, read the liturgy, and utter elaborate curses. At midnight, the candles are extinguished and the ten worshippers each blow the *shofar*, or ram's horn. Those gathered on the night of October 6 recited these maledictions:

Angels of destruction will hit him. He is damned wherever he goes.
His soul will instantly leave his body . . . and he will not survive a
month. Dark will be his path and God's angel will chase him. A di-

saster he has never experienced will beget him and all curses known in the Torah will apply to him.

I deliver to you, the angels of wrath and ire, Yitzhak, the son of Rosa Rabin, that you may smother him and the specter of him, and cast him into bed, and dry up his wealth, and plague his thoughts, and scatter his mind that he may be steadily diminished until he reaches his death. Put to death the cursed Yitzhak. May [he] be damned, damned, damned!¹³

Less than a month later, Yigal Amir walked up to Rabin in a parking facility near a rally Rabin had addressed and shot him to death.

Like the Temple Mount plotters, Amir would not act without explicit rabbinical sanction: "Without believing in God, I would never have had the power to do this—i.e., the belief in the after world. . . . I had to save the people because the people failed to understand the real conditions, and this is why I acted. . . . If not for the Halakhic ruling of *din rodef*, made against Rabin by a few rabbis I knew about, it would have been very difficult for me to murder. Such a murder must be backed up. If I did not get the backing and I had not been representing many more people, I would not have acted."¹⁴

Amir felt he had a privileged understanding of the catastrophe that awaited the Jewish people and believed that he could save them. Given these stakes, and the rabbinical guidance, there could be no conceivable constraint on his actions. As Amir expressed this, "*Din moser* and *din rodef* is the halakhic ruling. Once it is a ruling, there is no problem of morality. If I were involved now in the biblical conquest of the land, and as said in [the biblical Book of] Joshua, I would have had to kill babies and children, I would have done so regardless of the problem of morality. Once it is a ruling, I do not have a problem with it."¹⁵

BUDDHISM MEETS CHRISTIANITY AT THE END OF THE WORLD

A preoccupation with cosmic war and apocalyptic violence is not confined to the Judeo-Christian tradition. On March 20, 1995, at 7:45 A.M.,

five disciples of Shoko Asahara, a messianic pretender and leader of a quasi-Buddhist cult called Aum Shinrikyo, boarded separate Tokyo subway trains at the ends of the five lines that take commuters to the center of the city. All five trains were headed to Kasumigaseki station, underneath the complex of ministries at the heart of Japanese government. The five riders were skilled scientists: a cardiovascular surgeon who had studied in the United States, a former graduate student in particle physics at Tokyo University, two graduates in applied physics, and an electrical engineer. At 8:15 A.M., as the trains converged on Kasumigaseki station, the five used sharpened umbrella tips to pierce plastic containers containing a 30 percent solution of sarin, a nerve agent that kills by blocking the chemical reactions that enable muscle tissues to relax after flexing. It causes death within minutes. If disseminated effectively by aerosol spray, a few quarts would kill thousands of unprotected people. In this attack twelve people were killed and 5,500 were injured, many seriously. The small number of fatalities was due primarily to the way the liquid sarin was packaged and to atmospheric conditions, neither of which favored the rapid, even, and lengthy vaporization required for truly devastating results. As casualties flooded hospital emergency rooms, doctors were mystified by the symptoms they saw. It was not until 10:30 A.M. that an emergency physician recognized the symptoms—pin-dot-sized retinas, vomiting, and respiratory failure—as signs of nerve agent poisoning. And it was not until 1:30 P.M. that the first properly equipped personnel, wearing military chemical-protection suits, arrived at the scene of the attack. No one had expected this horror.

Shoko Asahara was the clerical title taken by a blind huckster named Chizuo Matsumoto. In 1987, he set up Aum Shinrikyo as a school for yoga practitioners and Buddhists. At the time Japan was teeming with syncretistic sects of every description. Some of these new movements are large-scale evolutionary developments within the framework of established religions like Buddhism and Shintoism. Others are new religions entirely, which emphasize magic and the occult as well as more widely accepted patterns of religious practice. These religions do not all remain confined to the Japanese islands. Some have a proselytizing vigor and

footholds in foreign countries where there are large Japanese expatriate populations. Aum Shinrikyo, which stressed missionary work, was a good example of this.

Religions have proliferated so swiftly since World War II that Japanese scholars have a hard time cataloging them. As of the 1970s, the category once dubbed “new religions” was already being replaced by a more up-to-date tag: “new, new religions.” These consisted mainly of groups with a strong apocalyptic bent, or a mystical approach to religious experience, or both. Depending on how individual observers differentiated between offshoots of established religions and their parent faiths and, indeed, how they defined religion, there were either dozens or hundreds of distinctive religions in the spiritual landscape of 1990s Japan. Secular factors played a role in this explosion of faiths, as they have in the growing diversity of Protestant denominations in the United States. The most important is the competition between religions for new adherents that emerges in countries where there is no official state religion. Where no religion has a monopoly on popular allegiance, each has to show that it has something unique, different, and better to offer than its rivals. Competition therefore encourages diversity. Another factor is tax policy. In Japan, as in the United States, there are significant financial advantages to having official “church” status.

Aum Shinrikyo was just one of many such new, new religions. Its syncretism was typical. In Aum’s case, the group’s essentially Buddhist orientation meshed with important elements from Christianity, especially an apocalyptic impulse that grew over time, and a belief in a messiah. It was unlike other groups, however, in the degree of its rigid authoritarianism and hierarchical structure. The group was probably enforcing discipline with deadly violence by the early 1990s. By the time it was dismantled in 1995, Aum was organized much like a government, with twenty ministries and even a “Household” ministry analogous to the government bureau that administered the emperor’s palace operations. The movement collected taxes, developed a lucrative business network, and cultivated ties with the army and the Yakuza, Japan’s criminal organiza-

tions. The recruits came from the best universities and were highly motivated achievers in the hard sciences and law. Many who were willing to make the break from family, friends, jobs, or school joined Aum communes, or *shuksheshas*. As apocalyptic societies have done since ancient times, those awaiting the end of time entered seclusion to maintain the purity that would entitle them to redemption after the great conflagration.

Between 1990 and 1995, the core beliefs promoted by Asahara were inculcated into the rank and file, although the more radical doctrines were withheld from the lower orders and revealed only to those who were in Asahara's immediate circle. Great importance was attached to Nostradamus's elaborate calculations predicting the precise dates on which great events would occur—including the end of the world—and to the Book of Revelation. Japan's glory, they believed, was being ground down by the corruption of the Japanese themselves and cultural pollution from the West. The situation was made even more dire by the vast conspiracy that threatened the Aum. Jews, Freemasons, the United States, and "world government" were determined to subvert and crush the movement. Members believed that Aum could create a race of superhumans through meditation and that this master race would establish a civilization that would survive the coming Armageddon. Asahara admired Hitler and his plan for a thousand-year Reich, which resonated in Asahara's mind with the millennium of Revelation. Individuals within the organization who introduced bad karma by expressing doubt or seeking to break with the group could legitimately be killed. Ultimately, the purified remnant, the disciples of Shoko Asahara, would survive the inevitable global devastation.

These astonishing ideas began to coalesce in Asahara's mind in reaction to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the victory of the United States-led coalition against Saddam Hussein's Iraq. The twin events seemed to him to be signs of the end time. With socialism eliminated as an option for human society, there was only the ideological temptation of materialism. However, all was not lost. In 1992 he declared: "I have made the following prediction . . . the genuine spiritualists will grow full

and shine like the sun, while Jewish materialists will be collected to be burned." During this period, Asahara became increasingly vocal about the imminence of cosmic war, how it would be fought, and who would survive. He was struck by the effectiveness and power of the weaponry deployed by the United States against Iraq. He obsessed about "ABC": atomic, biological, and chemical weapons, the use of which would dominate the imminent global war. He gave orders to perfect Aum's defenses, even mandating the creation of underwater cities in which his disciples could seek shelter. In preparation, group members were subjected to arduous training regimens, including submersion in water of extreme, though not lethal, temperatures. Asahara also gave the go-ahead to conduct research on weapons of mass destruction for the group's own use. It is possible that he had decided as early as March 1990 to nudge history along and spark Armageddon. While asserting publicly that his enemies were using chemical weapons against him, Asahara had Tsuchiya Masami, an accomplished university chemist, produce sarin for use in the expected third world war. Biological weapons were also fabricated, but never successfully used. The one known attempt was in April 1990, when Aum operatives sprayed the Japanese Diet with botulinum toxin. The group deployed a team to experiment in Australia, where it owned vast stretches of ranchland in the outback. They returned home leaving massive heaps of dead sheep behind them. (Some believe that Aum was mining uranium and somehow caused a huge explosion, which witnesses claimed to have heard from great distances.) Members were dispatched to Zaire to obtain the Ebola virus for cultivation as a weapon. The group's transnational presence, ranging from Russia, the United States, and Germany to Australia and Zaire, made acquisition of chemical- and biological-weapons precursors easier. Links with Russia also provided advanced conventional weapons and commando training.

Aum was also becoming more confrontational with surrounding Japanese society. On occasion they were able to turn these strains to their advantage. The town of Namino Kyushu paid the local Aum Shinrikyo branch about one billion yen to relocate. The constant mantras broadcast

over loudspeakers and the twenty-four-hour truck traffic and construction activity drove the inhabitants to desperation. But overall, the group's fortunes were deteriorating through this period. Recruitment dropped as new religions sprang up to compete for converts and donors, while Aum Shinrikyo's reputation became more sordid. Police interest because of the group's disputes with outsiders and reports of disappearances and murders put the group in an even more perilous position. This led to greater tensions as members were pressed to find new sources of funds and new converts. Asahara's fixation on conspiracies grew more baroque as he sought to rationalize the group's accelerating weakness and foster greater internal unity. He tried to have the leaders of two rival cults murdered. The biblical images of the apocalypse he had showcased within the group, which included angels, devils, and pestilential suffering, no longer sufficed to describe the scale of the coming disaster. Mushroom clouds replaced the fiery pit of Hell. Laser weapons, plasma guns, and a monstrous space-based mirror that focused the heat of the sun on the earth studded Asahara's descriptions of the coming catastrophe. These things were to come to pass first in 1996, then 1998. Armageddon was something of a movable feast.

As circumstances grew more desperate, Asahara's ideas about the end evolved further. *Po'a*, a Buddhist term for the rites performed on behalf of a deceased person to facilitate his or her transition to the next world, had already been redefined by Asahara to mean services provided before a person's death to ease the path to the afterlife. His service was to prevent spiritually defective or evil people from accumulating more bad karma than they had already, thereby impeding their own afterlife ascension to more ethereal spheres. Aum could render this service in various ways, but sometimes there was "no other way," according to Asahara, to *po'a* but to kill the person.¹⁶ By 1994, Asahara was talking about performing *po'a* for the whole world, instead of just Aum's external enemies and internal malcontents. He put this rhetoric into action on June 27, 1994, when Aum activists drove a refrigerator truck loaded with sarin into the city center of Matsumoto and released the gas. Matsumoto was chosen because it was

there that Asahara had been thwarted by the local court in an attempt to acquire land for a large Aum installation. Seven people were killed and 250 were treated for symptoms. The magistrates who had been the prime target were unhurt. Asahara himself publicly emphasized Nostradamus's prophecy that the judiciary will be corrupted in the countdown to Armageddon. Yet Japanese authorities remained oblivious to the threat for nearly a full year, initially misdiagnosing the injuries inflicted by the sarin, then concluding that the cause was insecticide spread by a nearby gardener.

By 1995, events were approaching their climax. The investigation of the Matsumoto attack finally gathered steam. So did police inquiries into the kidnappings and murders Asahara ordered as he understood himself more and more to be operating on a higher plane, no longer subject to human laws. The media began to speculate on how much time Aum had left, just as Asahara was speculating on how much time the world had. The powerful earthquake in the city of Kobe, Japan, combined with increased pressure from law enforcement and Asahara's premonitions of his own death to create the circumstances for the Tokyo subway attack.

It is still not entirely clear what Asahara thought the attack would accomplish. Did he mean it to confirm his repeated claims that chemical weapons were being used by others? Did he expect his followers to interpret it as proof of his apocalyptic warnings? Did he think it would set off the global Armageddon he had been predicting, or cripple Japan's government and thereby open the door to Aum Shinrikyo's government-in-waiting? None of these explanations is implausible, given what is known about Asahara's mental state and worldview in 1995. Nor are they mutually exclusive. In any event, he was ready for anything. The raid on his underground facility uncovered the equivalent of four million doses of sarin, quantities of other chemical weapons, cultures for Q fever and anthrax, and a million doses of LSD.¹⁷

Asahara's weird blend of messianic Christianity, apocalyptic fervor, and the Buddhist concept of "salvation through death," combined with his recruiting and organizational skills, came frighteningly close to creat-

ing hell for his country. The skepticism of law-enforcement and political authorities about the dangers of this bizarre cocktail of beliefs and capabilities mirrored the unwillingness of their European and American counterparts to acknowledge the continuing killing power of religion.

APOCALYPSE NOW

America is a more religious country than it was when it was founded in the late eighteenth century, and judging by public opinion survey returns, church attendance, financial donations, book purchases, and voting patterns, it's becoming even more so. There is also a growing fascination with Christian apocalyptic speculation and with signs that the events depicted in Revelation are at hand. A book series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins based on the prophecies in Revelation has sold 32 million copies since the first volume came out in 1995 (not counting the 18 million copies of the illustrated and children's versions). The tenth book in the series appeared in bookstores in 2002 in a hardcover printing of 2.75 million copies. September 11 boosted sales, as it did for the thousands of titles on apocalyptic themes published in the United States. According to a Time/CNN poll, about 35 percent of Americans think about the implications of the daily news for the end of the world. Fifty-nine percent believe that the future will unfold in accordance with Revelation. About 30 percent believe that the September 11 attacks were predicted by the Bible.

A small Christian subculture in the United States strongly believes in the notion of cosmic war. Believers are splintered into a number of small groups, the largest of which is the Christian Identity movement. According to Christian Identity ideology, the British are descended from "Aryan" northern Israelite tribes who migrated to the British Isles in the wake of the Babylonian conquest of ancient Israel. These Aryans are the true Jews of the Bible. This self-serving myth about the genetic superiority of the British people appeared in England in the nineteenth century and quickly died out there, but not before migrating to the United States.

The transplanted version took on anti-Semitic overtones, holding that contemporary Jews, who are assumed to be the descendants of the biblical Jews, are masquerading in that role and may well be the children of Eve and Satan. There are many variations on the core beliefs of the movement, which has now settled in Idaho and also has communities in the southern Midwest. Most adherents believe that mainstream Protestant churches in the United States are unwilling to confront the fraud perpetrated by the Jews, or have secretly been taken over by them. The Catholic Church is also believed to be part of this conspiracy. Identity sympathizers believe that the late-nineteenth-century Czarist forgery *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which purports to disclose the Jewish plan for world domination, is genuine. In pursuit of their goals, the Jews have teamed up, in one or another variation of this story, with the United Nations, the federal government and the Federal Reserve Bank, the Democratic party, Freemasons, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos to thwart the quest of Aryan Christians for liberty and independence. The world is not as it seems: Aryan Christians are the true Jews; the Jews are scheming impostors; ordinary churches are in league with Satan. These convictions are intertwined with an obsession with firearms. In the perilous world inhabited by these Aryans, they will need their weapons to prevent the government from completely subjugating them and enthroning the Jews. Gun control legislation is therefore part of a larger, barely visible conspiracy to enslave white Americans.

Many of these themes run through the plot of *The Turner Diaries*, by the late Christian Identity fantasist William Pierce (who wrote under the pen name Andrew MacDonald). Timothy McVeigh said that this was his favorite book. He hawked it at gun shows around the country, where it is highly popular, and reread it frequently. The novel portrays a guerrilla war waged in the United States by white supremacists, who fight against the federal government's brutal attempt to seize Americans' firearms as a prelude to their complete subjugation. The government's plan is supported by Jews. The insurgents, a monastic, hooded, robe-clad group called the Order, ultimately blow up FBI headquarters in Wash-

ington, D.C., using a five-thousand-pound truck bomb, killing seven hundred people. The attackers carry out the assault in order to awaken Christian Americans to their true situation and spur a wider revolt. The campaign includes the assassination of Jews and others and ultimately the obliteration of American cities with nuclear weapons captured from the government. These weapons are then used to destroy Israel and the Soviet Union. When Timothy McVeigh lit the two fuses of the 4,400-pound ammonium nitrate-and-fuel oil bomb in his Ryder truck, just before nine A.M. on April 19, 1995, he was enacting the fictional blow inflicted on the federal government in *The Turner Diaries*. Although McVeigh described himself to others as irreligious, his preoccupation with Christian Identity literature and attempts to link up with Elohim City, a movement commune on the Oklahoma border (Elohim is a biblical Hebrew name of God), suggest an overlap between his worldview and Christian Identity doctrine.¹⁸

McVeigh's transition from gun show enthusiast and libertarian to adherent to Christian Identity and member of a religiously oriented militia follows an established pattern. Recruits are exposed to these organizations and their ideology in settings where government attempts (real or imagined) to constrain gun ownership, monitor citizens' movements, or impose "unconstitutional" taxes are at issue. Religion is then offered as the way to comprehend what the government is doing and to justify violence as a response. Some, but by no means all, are seduced by the cosmic-war picture painted by militia ideologues. This war concept is at the center of the Aryan Nation creed: "We believe there is a battle being fought this day between the children of darkness (today known as the Jews) and the children of Light (God), the Aryan race, the true Israel of the Bible . . . we believe there will be a day of reckoning. The usurper will be thrown out by the terrible might of Yahweh's people as they return to their roots and their special destiny."¹⁹ A spokesman for the Christian Patriot movement, an assortment of far-right groups dominated by Christian Identity thinking, summarized these apocalyptic expectations in terms that might have come from a textbook on apocalyptic thought: "We are

Christian survivalists who believe in preparing for the ultimate holocaust. . . . The coming war is a step towards God's government."²⁰ First the terrible years, then the winnowing, then the establishment of the Kingdom of God. The underlying image of ancient conflict and a coming Armageddon is a powerful one in the United States, where a majority of Americans believe that Jesus Christ will reappear in their lifetimes and trigger the conflagration, bloodshed, and other horrific tribulations predicted by the Books of Revelation and Daniel. The acceptance of an imminent end-time catastrophe may not be as widespread now in the United States as it was, say, in fourteenth-century Europe, when scores of thousands roamed the continent in the grip of an end-of-the-world hysteria that threatened the viability of the Catholic Church and led to the virtual extermination of Jews in Germany and Belgium. But it is a significant feature of the country's religious landscape and it provides fertile ground for Christian Identity-like apocalypticism. Even Pat Robertson's 1991 book *The New World Order* partakes of this worldview, particularly in its reliance on traditional anti-Semitic motifs regarding a global Jewish conspiracy to control governments and world finance.²¹

What distinguishes the Christian Identity movement from the more traditional theology that informs much (but not all) fundamentalist worship in the United States is its rejection of key events anticipated by mainstream fundamentalists, especially the Rapture and conversion of the Jews. According to the New Testament, the saved will be "Raptured" to Heaven before the terrors of end-time "tribulation" commence. *Rapture* is the term for the ascension of the saved in this scenario:

For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord.²²

For Christian Identity thinkers, Rapture is a repugnant idea, which they deny has any basis in the Bible. They do not intend to be Raptured. They fully intend to be on earth during the tribulation to destroy the enemies of God, who are, of course, the Jews. This conviction justifies their militaristic posture. To fight and survive during the seven years of horrific bloodshed that according to Revelation will characterize the tribulation, they must be well armed, well trained, and well supplied. A well-known Identity figure, Sheldon Emry, wrote in disgust that "the rapture 'doctrine' has done more to disarm and make American Christians impotent than any other teaching since Jesus Christ."²³ The conventional fundamentalist view of biblical prophecies relating to the restoration of Israel is that they refer to Jews of today and to the state of Israel, not to Anglo-Saxons or Aryans who believe that they are the true Jews. Hence the satisfaction many mainstream fundamentalists take in the creation of the state of Israel and in its military successes, the capture of Jerusalem, and territorial expansion, which are taken to be signs of the end time. That most of these Jews will be slaughtered in the tribulation, which commences with a war in the Middle East, is not seen by believers as inconsistent with their pro-Israeli sentiments. In any case, this view of Jews is far too favorable for Christian Identity, which believes it has a responsibility to help God wipe the Jews out during the coming tribulation. There will be no Israelite remnant to be converted in the last days, apart from Identity believers themselves, who are the true Israel.

The self-consciously religious nomenclature and rituals associated with these movements helps them validate their extreme agendas. Leaders and spokesmen for the groups are dubbed "Reverend" or "Pastor." An initiation ceremony described by one observer emphasized these characteristics: it took place in a church, the aisle was lined with rifle-bearing participants, there was a procession, and the service used terms such as "God's soldiers" and "holy war," and stated the importance of killing with love because "God is with us." As for the conviction that the battle has been going on since time immemorial, the Aryan Nation's spiritual leader, the Reverend Richard Butler, in describing his ideological de-

velopment to a reporter, emphasized an insight he had as a younger man, that “this war has been going on for over 6,000 years between the sons of Cain and the sons of God.” Butler explained how this insight had given him a purpose in life.²⁴ The combination of religion with a belief in an all-or-nothing struggle with evil that will culminate in Armageddon demonizes the other and strips away constraints on violence. The Aryan Nation, according to a U.S. indictment, intended to “carry out assassinations of federal officials, politicians, and Jews, as well as bombings of and polluting of municipal supplies.” That was in 1983. The following year, authorities found thirty gallons of cyanide that was supposed to be used to contaminate the water supplies of Chicago and Washington, D.C.²⁵ The plot was intended to cause massive casualties, as was McVeigh’s bombing of the federal office building in Oklahoma City, which was the most damaging terrorist attack on American soil until September 11, 2001. In December 1999, the FBI thwarted a militia attempt to detonate two twelve-million-gallon tanks of liquid propane in Oak Grove, California, just outside Sacramento and about a mile from the nearest housing development. The conspirators, who were subsequently convicted, clearly aimed to cause massive casualties, either through a fireball that would engulf nearby communities, or by means of storage tank fragments that would rocket through vast distances at high velocity.

There is more. A Montanan, David Burgert, was arrested in 2002 for stockpiling machine guns, homemade bombs, and tens of thousands of rounds of ammunition to begin a nationwide revolt. According to the plan, Burgert’s militia was to kill twenty-six police and other officials in their corner of the state, defeat the National Guard, and finally spark a nationwide revolt against the federal government when Washington brought in NATO troops to suppress the militia. When the smoke cleared, America would once again be in the hands of white Christians. In the past year, similar conspiracies have been uncovered that aimed at bombing federal buildings in Michigan, assaulting Fort Hood in Texas—among other military bases—by taking advantage of a day when the sur-

rounding community is welcomed into the installation to visit, and destroying a nuclear power plant in Florida.

Events such as these merely hint at what is to come, according to a spokesman for the Church of Israel, an Identity group:

The fall of the American government is imminent. We are living already in the preparatory throes of a national and world wide revolution . . . as the agents of Satan who head the world wide conspiracy of the anti-Christ, plot and plan the total demise of Christian civilization and of the whole race. . . . A blood bath will take place in the soil of this great nation, that will end only in victory for Christ or Satan.²⁶

Time, we have seen, is compressed for those in the thrall of apocalyptic ideas. Ancient dramas replay themselves in modern circumstances, and when the believer acts forcefully enough, a reversal in history occurs, wrongs are righted, and injustices are avenged.

Perhaps it is a part of the militants' power that they have compressed time for all of us. It is extraordinary that only twelve years have passed since El-Sayyid Nosair gunned down Meir Kahane in New York, and less than a decade since the first attempted catastrophic attack, the first World Trade Center bombing. Yet within this short span, a new breed of terrorists has emerged and established itself as the preeminent threat to the West. Not only time but strategy has been turned inside out, and we must conjure new ways to defend ourselves against opponents who seek to use the most advanced technologies of the twenty-first century to fulfill imperatives laid down in the seventh century and, in some cases, before. Further, we must now beware of Christians who want to kill thousands, Jews who are prepared to turn the Middle East upside down, and highly educated cultists ready to use taboo weapons for reasons that still remain uncertain.

What is supremely puzzling is: Why now? So many forms of religious terrorism have appeared in such a short time after such a long absence.

We are a long way from taking the full measure of the new terrorists. Those who have committed the most atrocious violence—the jihadists, who are also the most numerous—have done the most to explain themselves. A surfeit of causes lies behind the challenge of bin Laden and his radical Islamists, including frustration with states that fail them politically and economically, a pessimism born of several centuries in which Muslim countries failed to achieve like Western ones, and the deep tremors of an Islamic reformation. Like the European Reformation of nearly five centuries ago, this Islamic upheaval will likely become much more bloody before a new equilibrium emerges. The jihadists are the greatest threat, and will likely remain that. But the shock of their appearance suggests that we should not be surprised if others soon challenge them, and us.